



**The roles and positions of teaching assistants in  
two urban primary schools: An ethnographic  
study of educational work and urban social  
change**

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## Abstract

Teaching assistants (TAs) are a growing and important occupational group within the primary school workforce. A poorly paid, low-status group, TAs have underpinned various policies and practices of inclusion within mainstream schools in recent times. In the urban context, research suggests that TAs can be agents of inclusion for marginalised and working-class pupils, as they are able to intermediate the dominant cultural and social processes of schooling and contribute to pedagogic action. Within this literature, it is assumed that the basis of this mediation rests on TAs' own sociocultural identities and positions with the urban order. Yet there has been little sociological analysis on the formation of TAs' identities and positions within the social class contexts of urban schools, and particularly in relation to the dynamic conditions specified by gentrification.

The study adopts an ethnographic approach, comprising 18 months of participant observation and interviewing within two primary schools in Inner London from 2004-2005. Theoretically, the thesis draws extensively from the work of Pierre Bourdieu – namely his concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *capitals* – and from Erving Goffman and Randall Collins the concept of *interaction ritual*.

Using this critical-theoretic framework, this thesis highlights the contrasting impact of gentrification in setting the contexts of urban schooling and the role of headship; the shaping influence of social class, career, gender, and race/ethnicity on assistants' trajectories and transitions into TA work, and how these formations influence the positions TAs occupy; and the different cultural, social and symbolic contributions TAs make to the institutional order. This study demonstrates the interconnections and transpositions of experiences and perspectives between the narrow institutional spaces of TAs' working lives and the wider social spaces of the neighbourhood. There is also a view to opening up new *methodological* spaces and integrating the study of assistants' working lives and roles within the concerns of the sociology of education.

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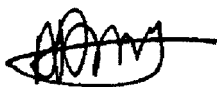
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## **Declaration and Word Count**

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

I have obtained permission to submit up to 100,000 words. Word count (exclusive of appendices, list of references and bibliography) is: 99,810 words.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ayodele Abdul Mansaray', written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending to the right.

**Ayodele Abdul Mansaray**

May 2012

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*Impossible, I realize, to enter another's solitude. If it is true that we can ever come to know another human being, even to a small degree, it is only to the extent that he is willing to make himself known. A man will say: I am cold. Or else he will say nothing, and we will see him shivering. Either way, we will know that he is cold. But what of the man who says nothing and does not shiver? Where all is intractable, here all is hermetic and evasive, one can do no more than observe. But whether one can make sense of what he observes is another matter entirely.*

(Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, pp.19-20)

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

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Despite a growth in importance, analysis of assistant roles remains limited. ... Few attempts, if any, have been made to understand the structure, operation and consequences of these roles underpinned by a framework that places assistants at the centre of the analysis. In part, this relative neglect reflects the tenor of public policy debate. TAs, for example, have been presented very much as a means to an end, in this case improving teachers' working conditions, rather than as a group of importance and interest in its own right. (Bach, Kessler and Heron, 2006: 3)

In this study, I offer an exploratory, critical ethnographic and sociologically-informed examination of the working lives and identities of teaching assistants (TAs) within primary schools. This is done in relation to complex contextualised aspects of emerging urban class formations and social relations.

This thesis began from a general dissatisfaction with existing scholarly and policy depictions of assistants' working lives. The study of TAs' working lives and roles has developed relatively insulated from the broader sociology of education, its theorisations and debates. To some extent this is explicable in terms of the low status of TAs and their work, an established research focus on teachers' working lives within the sociology of education and the strong policy framework within which the study of support work in schools has proceeded. In particular, at the time of my fieldwork this was the educational agenda set by *workforce remodelling*<sup>1</sup>. Research on TAs' working lives and roles has tended to be preoccupied with the policy concerns of governments and practising teachers (e.g. Hancock *et al.*, 2002; PwC, 2001; Watkinson, 2002), and centred on notions of "effectiveness", deployment and models of good practice (e.g. Blatchford *et al.*, 2006; Cremin, Thomas and Vincett, 2003), TAs' pay and working conditions (UNISON, 2002, 2004) and their Special Educational Needs (SEN) roles (e.g. Baskind, 2002; Moran and Abbot, 2002). Despite this growing literature, O'Brien and Garner remarked that there was "a serious danger" that the voice of the teaching assistant "will continue to remain never much in evidence" (2002: 2). There was very little theoretical and sociologically-informed research on TAs' working lives and

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<sup>1</sup> Workforce remodelling was an educational initiative introduced by the Labour government in 2003 to address teacher workload and retention issues through increased use of support staff with enhanced roles in teaching and learning (this is discussed in §1.1).



careers. Few studies attended to issues of social class in TAs' formation and work situation or located their occupational identities within an understanding of schools as "vehicles and sites for power struggles and which carry class relations" (Robertson, 2000: 292). This thesis marks a point of departure from this literature and its foci. It is an attempt to understand how the contexts of gentrification within localities unfold and are articulated within urban schools, and trace the consequences of social class colonisation – through the organisation of educational work, assistants' identities and experiences, and headship. The interests reflected in this study are empirical, sociological and methodological, and are crystallised in a number of interconnected themes and concerns.

There is a substantive empirical focus on TAs within two particular urban primary schools situated within contexts of social change, and on issues therein; such as, how TAs' institutional experiences, sense of belonging, commitment and identities are informed by their biographical trajectories and positioning within the wider changing urban social space as workers, parents and residents; and the ways that TAs' work situation articulates with the social and cultural processes of schooling. This empirical examination is framed and developed in relation to a number of topics centred on social relations of power within urban education, (middle-)class formation, and their re-contextualisation within school processes (i.e. educational work and staff relations). This requires an engagement with a number of different literatures in setting the scene (discussed in detail in chapter 2). First, of particular relevance is the *discourse of gentrification* as an account of social change and class relations in urban localities (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). Here research has focused on urban schools as arenas of sociocultural contestation and struggle as middle-class groups forge new forms of belonging, as well as securing class advantage and intergenerational social reproduction for their children (DeSena, 2006; Hamnett, 2003). A particularly significant account is provided by Robson and Butler (2001) who have argued that "class colonisation" – a strategy of explicit social and cultural control of urban primary schools – is increasingly popular amongst some fractions of the urban middle-classes, through which their claims over others to a place within the urban order are manifested.

Second, there is engagement with the critical work of Gerald Grace (1978) and others (e.g. Maguire, 2001; Reay et al., 2007) on urban schools – those schools which have historically educated, and continue to educate, predominantly working-class and disadvantaged populations in the inner-cities. These scholars have rejected the notion of education as a socially transcendent process, and view urban schools as important institutions of control, confrontation and power, managing and mediating class relations in a capitalistic economy. Thus, within this literature there has been a focus on educational work as a form of *class-work* and on educators' social class position, identity, and ideological formation. Third, this notion of educational work as a form of class mediation is given specificity in relation to assistants' roles and positions within urban schools in the writings of U.S. scholars Monzó and Rueda (2001) and others. Writing from a broadly sociocultural perspective, these authors have developed what has become known as the "funds of knowledge" framework to support empirical studies of assistants' roles and positions as institutional *mediators* of students' household cultural and social resources. They argue that TAs can address some of the educational disadvantage experienced by minority ethnic students and families by facilitating the incorporation of their experiences and knowledge into pedagogic and other school contexts.

This existing literature raises a number of interesting problematics in relation to the focus of this study. Clearly, to be a mediator is to span different, social, cultural and symbolic worlds, which may be riven with divisions. My review of the existing literature on TAs (in chapter 2) reveals that the way TAs experience the different and potentially conflictual urban and institutional milieus they inhabit requires further exploration. We need a clearer exposition of how TAs' own background, class, career, ethnicity and gender inform their institutional positioning and identities, and how these formations might influence the different cultural, social and symbolic contributions TAs make. At the same time, such an exploration needs to be sensitive to power relations within schools and the opportunities for, and limitations of, TA action. This will include teachers' own practices and actions, as well as the institutional dynamics of schools, notably headship. Whereas those working within the sociocultural approach assume a relatively homogenous and stable urban (working-)class culture with its associated "funds of knowledge", which might be incorporated within the educational process, the changing class landscapes presented by gentrification add emergent complexities to any

consideration of TAs' work and roles. An analysis of TAs' positions in light of urban class relations can therefore illuminate the tensions, opportunities and constraints under which the educational goals of schooling are realised.

A key issue permeating the above problematics is *power* and the processes by which social structures are generated and changed; what Parker (2000: 6) refers to as "structuration"<sup>2</sup> and the lived realm of actions. The methodological framework thus provides the essential link between the empirical and theoretical foci. It enables a focus on culture and action through the lens of power, the forms it takes, and its consequences for those who are subtly and overtly oppressed by it (Carspecken, 1996). Theoretically, the framework (detailed in chapter 3) draws extensively from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1990b) – namely his concepts of *habitus*, *field*, *capitals* – and from Erving Goffman (1983) and Randall Collins (2004) the concept of *interaction ritual*. These are sociologists arguably concerned, in their different conceptual idioms, with social relations of power and the possibilities of human freedom. These conceptual tools are deployed in a critical ethnographically-inspired case study approach that is concerned with the representation of the complexity of perspectives, practices, processes and actions within specific locales, namely urban school sites. Qualitative research of this type is intended to produce a detailed, *realist* account of substantive empirical school contexts that "is combined with critical insights into how wider structures are mediated and produce change" (Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001: 193). This is exemplified in the ethnographic orientation of Sharp and Green's (1975) work on "progressive education" and the structuring of pedagogic opportunities and pupil identities; Fine's (1991) study of students "dropping out" in a public high school in New York; and McLaren's (1993) iconoclastic portrayal of working-class Azorean students in a Catholic high school in Toronto. The aim is to open up a theoretical and empirical space for a complex and contextualised analysis, supportive of inquiry into educational work and class formation. In so doing, this study aims at a level of sociological description and critical theorisation which has largely been absent within studies of TAs' working lives and positions. This dimension of the thesis is developed in chapter I.

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<sup>2</sup> Following Parker (2000: 6), structuration simply refers to "structure-producing processes" and not any implied commitments to Giddens' (1984) "structuration theory".

Having briefly introduced the main themes of the thesis and the methodological strategy for their exploration; a short socio-political contextualisation of the TA role in England follows. This provides a sense of the development of the role, highlighting the marginalised, ambiguous and dominated position which it has occupied within the educational workforce. The chapter concludes with an overview of the study and an outline of the subsequent chapters.

### ***1.1. TAs: From Plowden to workforce remodelling***

The use of the term “TA” as an occupational designation for what is generally acknowledged to be a somewhat loose set of similar and overlapping roles and job titles<sup>3</sup> – such as classroom assistant (CA) and learning support assistant (LSA) – within English schools, can be dated to the guidance provided by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 2000. They defined the role thus:

The term “teaching assistant” (TA) is the government’s preferred generic term of reference for all those in paid employment in support of teachers in primary, special and secondary schools. That includes those with a general role and others with specific responsibilities for a child, subject area or age group. (DfEE, 2000: 4)

The TA role is very diverse and encompasses a range of duties and responsibilities which, as I show, has expanded over time. It ranges from assisting with pedagogic preparation, to whole class, specialist small group and one-to-one teaching, lunchtime supervision, management and delivery of targeted curriculum programmes and the delivery of after-school activities. Moreover, some of these roles and responsibilities may be held by one person or several. However, the TA role and its synonyms have a much longer history which reveals a number of persistent themes in the development and position of TAs within the education profession. These provide a framing for the substantive empirical aspects of this study.

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<sup>3</sup> There are a plethora of lesser-used titles, such as: primary helper, welfare assistant, special educational needs assistant, ancillary, and so on (Lee and Mawson, 1998; UNISON, 2002, 2004). Historically, the LSA job title in England has had a more specific connotation, referring to support of a particular child or children identified as having special educational needs (SEN). Within the nursery setting, the parallel and much older nursery nurse classroom support role is an important part of the story. In this study, I refer to nursery nurses as “TAs”, unless specified otherwise, a usage that is consonant amongst researchers (Blatchford et al., 2006). In the USA, “teachers’/instructional aides”, “paraeducators” and “paraprofessionals” are commonly used (Watkinson, 2002: 2).

Since the notion of an institutionalised education assistant to “assist hard-pressed teachers and take over some of their lesser responsibilities”, referred to as a “teacher’s aide”, was first formulated in the Plowden report (DES, 1967, para. 1036), the development of the role has been widely viewed by teachers’ unions as a threat to the material, cultural and social interests of the teaching profession (Lodge and Blackstone, 1984). Unions have feared that increased numbers of TAs would inject downward supply-side pressures on teachers’ wages, educational qualifications and skills base. In addition, the predominance of women (often parents) within the TA workforce raised the possibility of a “re-feminisation” of primary school teaching, reinforcing public perceptions of primary schooling as maternal or feminine work and thus weakening teachers’ (already problematic) claim to specialist pedagogic expertise (Dillabough, 1999). The result has been a tense and at times antagonistic relation between the two groups, and a marginalisation of TAs.

Resistance to Plowden’s recommendations meant that its “teachers’ aides” scheme was never implemented. From the 1980s onwards, the numbers of TAs within primary schools slowly grew and the role evolved. This was encouraged by changes to the legal and social position of pupils with SEN and by successive structural reforms of the teaching profession (e.g. introduction of a National Curriculum) with increasingly devolved school management and governance (Clayton, 1993; DES, 1978). Within this context, local authorities and schools responded to the demands of “inclusion” of pupils with SEN through the deployment of assistants to provide “extra support for the teacher in the classroom” (Clayton, 1993: 38). Teachers soon attempted to integrate assistants’ roles within their own work activities. Thus by accretion TA numbers grew and the role shifted from the menial tasks of the classroom, “washing paint-pots”, to that of “assistant teacher” with significant involvement in pedagogy (Clayton, 1993: 42).

In spite of these changing boundaries, assistants remained largely absent from the political agenda. In 1993, there was an ill-fated attempt by Chris Patten (Secretary of State for Education) to formally develop the assistant role within Key Stage 1 (i.e. infant phase) to make it co-extensive, in respect of training and rewards, with the roles of teachers, but this was again challenged and defeated by teacher unions (The Independent, 1993; Thornton and Bricheno, 2000). The scheme was dubbed “Mum’s

Army” by media commentators and critics (Hansard, 15th June 1993), confirming the unions’ fears of feminisation. The legacy of this aborted reform was the introduction of the Specialist Teaching Assistant Certificate (STAC) qualification in 1994. This was awarded by Higher Education (HE) institutions, for existing assistants and volunteers within the Early Years classroom, to enable them to undertake an enhanced pedagogic role. The STAC created *legitimate* opportunities for greater involvement in teaching, which in turn led to increased confusion as work boundaries between assistants and teachers became more blurred (Edwards and Clemson, 1997; Hutchings, 1997).

During the 1990s, there was phenomenal growth in assistants, which began to draw the attention of researchers (e.g. Baskind and Thompson, 1995; Dyer, 1996; Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997b) and Her Majesty’s Inspectors (Ofsted, 1998). The number of TAs grew from 38,400 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) in 1993 to 71,000 in 2000, an increase of 85 per cent. This was driven by the complex interplay of longstanding factors such as local authorities’ SEN inclusion policies, further curricular reform (e.g. the introduction of national literacy and numeracy strategies in 1997 and 1998 respectively), increasing diversity of learners and their needs, and wider social policies to address disadvantage (Bourne, 2001; Ofsted, 2002; Wallace and McMahon, 1993). Some policies, such as Excellence in Cities (EiCs), created new assistant-type roles; for example learning mentors, intended specifically to address the cultural and social “barriers” facing students and their families in deprived urban areas and tackle educational inequalities (Golden *et al.*, 2001; Ofsted, 2003a). Learning mentors had a broad remit providing support and guidance not only to pupils, but parents, for example on behaviour management strategies. They also had different pay and conditions to other assistants, although again these were locally agreed. Unrelated, but equally important, were growing concerns, seen in successive government reports from 1999-2002, about teacher workload, recruitment and retention (e.g. DfES, 2002; Morris, 2001; PwC, 2001). A central theme was the call for the increased use of TAs and other support staff to alleviate pressure on teachers.

By 2003, the assistant role had evolved into an important mechanism of *inclusion* for diverse learners. Figures from 2004 showed that “educational support staff” numbered just under 104,000 FTE (DfES, 2005). The resulting political activity culminated in a legislative document entitled *A National Agreement: Raising Standards and Tackling*

*Workload* in 2003. It set out a plan for creating time for teachers and heads, and the pursuant contractual changes. The National Agreement would be implemented through a set of policy and change processes known as “workforce remodelling” (National Remodelling Team, 2004). Amongst other things, the agreement planned greater pedagogic involvement for TAs, plus expansion of the support staff workforce. New roles and forms of deployment were planned, with the introduction of the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) and the “cover supervisor” role, which would enable TAs to legally take charge of whole classes during teacher absence. The HLTA status would enable assistants to lead learning, particularly within small groups on particular subject areas, or other areas of expertise (e.g. behaviour management, pastoral care etc.). Additional training, supported by the Teacher and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), would be provided to develop the skills and qualifications profile of the TA workforce.

Whilst TAs were represented by general and public sector unions (e.g. UNISON and GMB) in negotiations over the proposals, it was from a position of relative weakness. Some teacher unions (notably the NUT) expressed concern that these changes would erode teacher professionalism, whilst support staff union representatives were apprehensive that TAs would be “given more responsibilities without proper rewards” (Hinds, 2002: 6). Overall, the workforce remodelling agenda promised integration for assistants, as well as long overdue acknowledgment of their work in schools. The National Agreement stated:

support staff will be increasingly recognised for the contribution they make to raising pupil standards. ... [They] will have access to expanded roles and improved choices and career opportunities, including proper recognition for existing responsibilities. (2003: 3)<sup>4</sup>

How these new roles and shifts in work boundaries would play out in the myriad contexts of TAs’ and teachers’ work, not least in the inner-city, remained to be seen. This then was the political *moment* and backdrop as I embarked on the study. To conclude this contextualisation, there follows a summary of the general characteristics and status of the TA workforce at the time of the fieldwork.

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<sup>4</sup> The promise of enhanced status for TAs was not supported by any additional funding to address the longstanding disparities in remuneration between TAs and teachers.

## **1.2. The TA workforce**

As mentioned above, TAs have occupied a marginalised position within the primary educational workforce. This was reflected in the casualised nature of their employment conditions. Many were employed on *ad hoc*, term-time only or other insecure contractual terms. Surveys indicated that a majority of assistants did not work to specific job descriptions and deployment was erratic and inconsistent, with many TAs undertaking significant amounts of unpaid overtime (Neill, 2004; Smith, Whitby and Sharp, 2004). Assistant work was also poorly remunerated (UNISON, 2002). Cohen *et al.* (2004: 76) indicated that the average hourly earnings of educational support staff were less than 50 per cent of those of teachers. Unlike teachers, TAs had no national pay scales or structures for progression, and their remuneration was not considered in relation to teachers but rather on a scale with other local authority employees such as cleaners and administrative staff (Butt and Lance, 2005; Revell, 2005). Farrell *et al.* found that even amongst teachers and heads, there was a recognition that the “pay differentials [were] ... totally unjustified given the work that LSAs were expected to do” (2000: 27).

The TA workforce was also a highly gendered one. According to surveys, over 90 per cent of assistants were female, often drawn from the ranks of parental volunteers (Labour Research Department, 2004). However, newer assistant roles, such as learning mentors, have more of a gender mix (DCSF, 2007). Nonetheless, overall, assistant work could be said to have a “feminine” occupational image, involving as it did sex-stereotyped work (caring for children), within a domain (primary schooling) traditionally perceived as “women’s work” (Grumet, 1988). In sum, TAs shared few, if any, of the material benefits of the teaching profession. They constituted a marginalised, low-status and substantive occupational fraction of the education workforce.

## **1.3. The study**

This study is supported by an *ethnographically-inspired* case study of TAs’ working lives within two urban primary schools. The two schools, Plumtree and Greenvale, are within the inner-city London Borough of Croxfield. They are situated within the



immediate neighbourhood localities of Northwick and Earlsdale<sup>5</sup> respectively. The main research data generation was through 18 months of participant observation fieldwork in these two primary schools, from March 2004 to September 2005. In addition, I had conducted a small pilot study within the same borough (in 2002) which provided some of the initial inspiration and focus for this research. The choice of two schools in this study was an attempt to open up a comparative empirical space in which to explore intra- and inter-school and neighbourhood contrasts.

As mentioned earlier, “TA” is the government’s favoured term but only one of several titles in common usage previous to, during and after the fieldwork period. In this study, the term TA (and its international equivalents) is used and, where appropriate, informants’ own classifications and understandings. Although as a definition it is somewhat fuzzy, it reflects the ambiguity and complex messiness of the development of the role it attempts to capture and regulate in policy and workplace contexts. The ethnographic dimensions of this study are developed in part in relation to the initial framing this and other synonymous terms provide. Below I set out the aims and research questions for the study and present the thesis structure as it is developed in the main chapters.

### **1.3.1. Aims and research questions**

Having briefly outlined the motivating lines of argument and themes, I will now formally express these in terms of the aims of the study. These aims once met constitute the *thesis*, namely to describe, through a *critical* ethnographic case study approach, how the contextualised aspects of neighbourhood social change articulate and intersect with educational institutional processes and realities. That is to say, how neighbourhood social class formation and structuration (as class colonisation) set the emergent cultural, social and symbolic conditions in which urban schools are positioned and TAs and teachers negotiate their work, relationships and identities. This requires exploring how TAs’ working lives, and their personal and professional formation in terms of class, career, ethnicity and gender, articulate with these wider social processes, and in turn inform assistants’ institutional perspectives, experiences, positions and

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<sup>5</sup> Neither Earlsdale nor Northwick map onto exact geographic or administrative areas, but rather they index shifting and contested cartographies of belonging, mainly in relation to the powerful signifier of “Croxfield”. This is explored in greater detail in chapter 5.

relationships. Secondly, how these are articulated with the role of headship in negotiating class colonisation and shaping the contexts of TAs' work. Overall, I aim to explicate the ways that TAs contribute to the reproduction of the cultural, social and symbolic order within urban schools. This study attempts to demonstrate the interconnections and transpositions of experiences and perspectives between the narrow institutional spaces of TAs' working lives and the wider social spaces of the neighbourhood. The theoretical framework deploys critical theory developed from the works of Bourdieu, Goffman and Collins.

### **1.3.2. Organisation of the thesis and empirical research questions**

Paul Rock has argued that “the prime ethnographic maxim is that one cannot know what one is exploring until it has been explored” (2001: 33). This study and the length of its gestation confirm this maxim. The order in which findings and analysis are presented – and therefore the introduction to all of the above – is not the order that they were produced or encountered, but rather an emergent order which facilitates the articulation of the arguments of the thesis and the exposition of its theoretical framework while maintaining the integrity of the fieldwork and empirical analysis. The presentation of the study is necessarily formulated with greater coherence and narrative logic than the reality of its actual production. For instance, gentrification was not an explicit initial focus, and only became so later as an emergent dimension of fieldwork experience and subsequent analysis. This is not uncommon in qualitative research, particularly in ethnographic work, which involves a protracted period of immersion in the daily contexts of individuals and groups, with the unpredictability this entails. Foci change in response to events, and new possibilities present themselves in the field, which in turn leads to the revising of research questions and incorporating of ideas from the reading of literature, and so on. A sense of this process is given in chapter 4, where the practical logics of the research as it transpired are discussed. Such work is very rarely a linear process but rather a complex engagement with data, fieldwork, literature and theory, which nevertheless leads to the production of an emergent coherent and integrated set of statements. Thus my own sense of the importance of neighbourhood class relations for intra-institutional processes and practices, as reflected in the experiences of TAs, was crystallized *during* the fieldwork

rather than prior to it. Equally, the theoretical framework developed as a response to the emergent empirical themes so as to render them tractable to sociological analysis and argument, rather than the fieldwork serving as the intended application of theory.

With this preamble, I present the empirical research questions of the thesis. They are intended to guide and orientate the reader to its central themes. Each question deals with a different level of analysis and social reality: neighbourhood contexts, TAs' personal and professional formation, educational work and school headship, TAs' negotiation of the formal and informal institutional order.

1. How is gentrification manifested within the immediate neighbourhood contexts of Earlsdale and Northwick and how are the schools (Plumtree and Greenvale) positioned within their differing fields of gentrification?
2. What are the biographical and other influences (e.g. class, career, ethnicity, gender) on TAs' formation and transitions into TA work?
3. What are TAs' institutional positions and identities, and contributions formal and informal structures within Plumtree and Greenvale?
4. What is the role of headship in negotiating gentrification and shaping the contexts of educational work?

### **1.3.3. Overview of the chapters**

The presentation of the thesis is organised into ten chapters in total. These are outlined below.

The first four chapters introduce and situate the study within relevant sociological and policy debates. They develop the main theoretical framework, providing a rationale for the methodological approach taken. The second chapter develops in-depth the substantive focus on TAs' working lives in relation to sociological themes – as found in the literature on gentrification, urban schooling and TAs' sociocultural mediation. Chapter 3 provides an extended discussion of the theoretical framework of the thesis, encompassing Bourdieu's key concepts of habitus, field and capitals and those of Goffman and Collins, namely interaction ritual. It provides the connective tissue of the thesis, describing the methodological approach adopted. Chapter 4 explains the

ethnographic case study method implemented in the thesis, and its epistemological and ontological underpinnings. It also provides an account of the methods of fieldwork, instrumentation, the forms of data generated, the negotiation of fieldwork relationships and the analytic procedures that guided analysis. There is a discussion of ethics, researcher reflexivity and issues of anonymity and representation in ethnography. Collectively, these chapters set the scene for what emerged as the holistic form of the thesis, in relation to the empirical analysis and its ethnographic presentation.

Chapters 5 to 9 comprise reporting of the empirical components of this study. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on elaborating the neighbourhood contexts of Earlsdale and Northwick in terms of gentrification, the position of the schools within them, and TAs' personal and professional formation. These chapters move from the wider social spaces of neighbourhood to the narrower confines of TAs' working lives. Chapter 5 provides a portrayal of Northwick and Earlsdale through a description of their production as contrasting gentrified localities, and the complex and emergent cultural, social and symbolic class conditions this establishes for schooling in Plumtree and Greenvale. Further, it sets the context for understanding TAs' own locations within the social space in the chapter that follows. Chapter 6 is a detailed analysis of the biographical narratives of TA-informants at Plumtree and Greenvale in terms of the formation of their habitus and the development of a vocational orientation towards assistant work. This chapter demonstrates commonalities and differences amongst TAs across and within the two schools, profiling the role and significance of TA work for schools.

Chapter 7 focuses on common features of TAs' intra- and cross institutional experiences, including the negotiation of educational work and the contexts of headship. Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the informal and formal institutional order. They focus on TAs' negotiation of the cultural, social and symbolic processes and structures within Plumtree and Greenvale. Chapter 8 focuses on TAs' experiences and actions within formal interaction rituals, namely support staff meetings, and the opportunities these provide for participation and inclusion/exclusion in institutional power structures. Chapter 9 considers the informal cultural and symbolic landscape and TAs'

contribution and position within it. This is done through a close analysis of interaction rituals within the staffrooms of Plumtree and Greenvale.

The concluding chapter revisits the aims and research questions of the study and how they were addressed to constitute the thesis. It considers the key contributions and implications of the study, and suggests ways that further work can be developed.

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## Chapter 2 – Schooling, Class and TAs’ Work

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The inner-city was at one and the same time, the location of great cultural, financial, social and political resource while the working class schools adjacent to these resources were said to be in a situation of crisis in cultural, educational and social terms. How was this possible? (Grace, 2007: 1)

This chapter elaborates on the key themes and problematics which provide the motivating topics of the thesis. It shows where, and how, TAs’ working lives and institutional experiences in urban schools are positioned within sociological and other literature, and points to the gaps that remain within the field. A number of important themes are addressed. First, there is an examination of the changing urban contexts of schooling through a discussion of *gentrification* as an approach to understanding the contemporary urban scene, seeking out its implications for social relations in general and schooling in particular. Following this, the notion of the *urban school* is introduced as a focus of sociological enquiry proceeding from the work of Gerald Grace (1977) on the socio-historical location and mediating role of urban schools in the matrix of class relations, and subsequent developments. This conceptualisation of urban schools underpins the subsequent discussion of TAs’ role.

These two literatures are then developed in relation to the problematic of “class colonisation” in urban primary schools as an aspect of middle-class collective action within the inner-city. I then present the sociocultural approach to the study of TAs’ work within urban contexts (e.g. Cable, 2004; Rueda, Monzó and Higareda, 2004). This literature articulates an explicit focus on assistants’ mediatory role in school processes and social relations. The final section develops the connective themes in the literature presented and outlines the issues which remain underdeveloped. Overall, this chapter seeks to map the contours of the intellectual and empirical space in which this study is located.

## **2.1.      *Gentrification: middle-class formation and power***

Urban social change has long been viewed as significant in the development and articulation of (working-)class relations (Pahl, 1983). The inner-cities<sup>6</sup> of Western industrialised countries are not only more ethnically and racially diverse than they have ever been, they are also culturally, and in class and lifestyle terms, more plural. They are now home to an ever-increasing population of white middle-class inhabitants in what were predominantly working-class, often ethnically-mixed neighbourhoods, first observed and described by Glass (1964). She argued, presciently, that gentrification was a process of displacement of one social group by another, more powerful, who have the resources – social, cultural and economic – to upgrade the residential housing stock of an area and realise high rates of return. Gentrification therefore shapes the aesthetic social and cultural fabric of neighbourhoods including inequalities (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008).

For Butler and Robson (2003a), gentrification is best understood as an expression of class powers in urban contexts, a form of middle-class collective action. They argue that the key to understanding gentrification is to recognise that it is the practice of (predominantly) white middle-class groups, drawn disproportionately from segments of the middle-classes that Bernstein referred to as the “new middle-class” (1975b). This is to say, those whose power and social reproduction rests not on control or ownership of financial and property capital, but “in its control over the transmission of critical symbolic systems: essentially through control over *various* forms of public education” (Bernstein, 1975b: 17); members of professional groups such as teachers, lawyers, social workers, journalists, artists, academics, etc. Gouldner (1979) similarly highlighted the significance of a culturally-endowed group in society which he referred to as the “cultural bourgeoisie”. This section of the middle-class was transformational because it offered a “critique of established forms of domination and provides an escape from tradition, but it also bears the seeds of a new domination” (1979: 828). Gouldner

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<sup>6</sup> The focus on the inner-city reflects particular national and historical patterns of urban development and housing tenure strongly represented in the UK and North America. By contrast, in Paris and other European cities, the working-class and poor have tended to be relegated to the outlying suburbs and therefore gentrification takes on a different spatial form, which inflects the specificities of the problematic as detailed here – (for discussions of gentrification in other national contexts see Carpenter and Lees, 1995; Slater, 2005; Van Criekingen and Decroly, 2003).

presaged that this “cultural class” was “both emancipatory *and* elitist” (1979: 827). According to Ley, this middle-class fraction:

form[s] a theoretical counterpoint to nineteenth century notions of capital and labour ... a class in emergence. ... Their lifestyle is consumption and status orientated in pursuit of self-actualisation. (Ley cited in Hamnett, 2003: 53)

The issue of middle-class formation, identity and practice is therefore a wider theme which is reprised by scholars in the discourse of gentrification.

Butler and Robson’s (2003a) work is concerned with divisions and subtle differences amongst middle-class fractions, which they connect to the development of place-based identities and practices in specific locations, for example in London. In their account, gentrification is a consequence of *globalising* transformations in the economic, political and social structures of societies in recent times. They argue that the middle-classes are experiencing a loss of control, as a result of these wider changes and the impact on their working and personal lives. For Butler and Robson, the middle-classes are thus coming to terms with a different world from where they were raised and educated. Living and working in Inner London, for instance, with its predominantly working-class multi-ethnic populations, presents “challenges” to the white middle-classes who generally have ethnically-homogenous middle-class backgrounds (Butler and Robson, 2003a). Gentrification represents an elaboration of middle-class “coping strategies”:

an attempt to reconcile this present with a somewhat nostalgic view of the past ... [which] is manifested by a desire to build a local community within the global city that maps onto their particular set of values, backgrounds, aspirations and resources. (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 11)

In Butler and Robson’s model of gentrification, using Bourdieu’s (1984, 1986) concepts of habitus, capitals and field, the middle-classes have at their disposal different assets (i.e. social, economic and cultural capital), which are deployed in four key structured contexts (i.e. fields): housing, consumption, employment and education. As incomers to the inner-city, deciding where and how to live, and raise their children is, for the middle-classes, an open-ended and complicated affair as they attempt to keep all fields in play. Different fractions of the middle-classes, in virtue of their particular stocks of capitals – indicative of shared class and occupational backgrounds – will enact particular strategies and trajectories in key social fields. These result in localised gentrified “mini-cultures” that constitute variegated communities of “taste”, values and



distinction (Robson and Butler, 2001; Webber, 2007). This structured practice is a result of what Robson and Butler (2001) refer to as the “metropolitan habitus”. As they observe, neighbourhoods “acquire meanings, resonances and identities that are both attractive to particular middle-class individuals and also deeply socialising of them” (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 2). In choosing where they live, the middle-class identify with like-minded “people like us” and thus the habitus of classed dispositions acquires “spatial characteristics” (Butler, 2002, §1.12). As Watt adds, “social distinctions therefore take an implicit or explicit spatial form as people attempt to sort themselves into a geographical as well as social habitus, i.e. *where* they feel comfortable with others ‘like themselves’”. Butler and Robson (2003a) therefore maintain that place is now a vital mediation of class formation and differentiation as the middle-classes strive to make life in the inner-city amenable for social reproduction. Further, it is increasingly recognised that the education field is a key axis of this intergenerational social reproduction and the “battle ground” for gentrifiers “is for education and control of the streets as much as housing” (Hamnett, 2003: 185).

## **2.2. *Gentrification and education: class colonisation***

Urban middle-class formation and intergenerational social reproduction must be set in the context of wider and emergent class relations within education. Changes in educational policy at the national level, notably the 1988 Education Act and the introduction of audit forms of accountability, have institutionalised the priority of “parental choice” as a fundamental principle in the educational system. This policy shift has re-positioned parents as “consumers”, who must negotiate their way through the options available in the educational quasi-marketplace. This market rationality has realised new opportunity structures through which middle-class groups have been able to extend their monopoly over educational resources, particularly within urban contexts (Ball, 2003). Studies have shown how middle-class parenting practices exclude others, in part because they tend to be more strategic in their relations to schooling than working-class households (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1995). As Ball *et al.* argue: “parents are oriented [in different ways] culturally and materially ... towards the education market. Some see it as a market and others do not” (1995: 419). Educational policy has therefore contributed to further inequalities in educational provision by enabling middle-class groups to benefit from their power to exercise choices.

However, within the urban context, schools with predominantly working-class and impoverished intakes have presented a “challenging” context for middle-class intergenerational social reproduction. According to Butler and Robson, schooling in the inner-city milieu infuses the gentrified habitus with anxiety:

threat is perceived at every level: the failings of the state education system, the interaction with non-middle class children at school, on the journey to school, and in the increasingly brand-dominated monoculture. (2003a: 4)

There is a deep ambivalence – of attraction and repulsion – towards urban schools which resonates across the metropolitan habitus, and is mediated through different “class strategies”. Butler and Robson identify these strategies as concerning “the ability to re-create cultural capital on an intergenerational basis in which competition in the ‘field’ exists to create prestigious and useful credentials” (2003a: 72). Strategies are determined by parents’ position in the wider social space: their willingness and capacity to pay; their orientation to educational markets; housing tenure and wealth which can be used to negotiate catchment areas and other resources; and stocks of dominant forms of cultural and social capital. These all interact with the perceived quality of educational provision to construct different educational trajectories in different localities. Thus, depending on the gentrified habitus of a particular neighbourhood, one or more strategies may be dominant. Of most interest to our discussion is that found in neighbourhoods in which the middle-class espouse an ideological commitment to state education, and where segments of Gouldner’s (1979) “cultural bourgeoisie” or Bernstein’s (1975a) “new middle-class” predominate.

Butler and Robson define colonisation as the wholesale transformation of the “performance and ambience of a primary school(s) in the locality ... through the successful deployment of cultural and social capital” (2003a: 72). That is, the transformation of an urban primary school with predominantly multi-ethnic working-class pupils into one with a largely white middle-class intake. They posit a process whereby social capital is realised in networks which enhance and “collectivise” the individual cultural capital of households. Such class action, and the associated habitus, is dependent on class consciousness or, in their phrase, “collective awareness” as well as an ideological narrative of “equality of opportunity and meritocracy” (2003a: 73). As the process unfolds, middle-class presence and action signal and activate further involvement, increasing the visibility and desirability of the school to the wider field of

gentrification, which reinforces existing circulation of cultural capital and activation of social capital (Maguire, Wooldridge and Pratt-Adams, 2006: 4-6). This strategy is likely to be pursued by those middle-class fractions relatively low in economic capital and involves the active deployment of families' cultural capital. Such class action is directed at the personnel and institutional practices of urban schools. It involves middle-class parents asserting their social power over teachers – as evidenced by greater confidence in interactions, greater willingness to criticise teachers; and a propensity to demand customised and/or additional provision for their children (Reay, 1998, 2005; Weininger and Lareau, 2003). This process is accompanied and facilitated by the symbolic power<sup>7</sup> of their being viewed simply as “good” and “involved parenting” in contrast to working-class forms of engagement which are often seen as inappropriate and inattentive (Crozier, 1999). As a strategy it is dependent on parental – or more accurately, as feminist analyses highlight, maternal – engagement with schooling (Reay, 1998).

This type of strategy is concomitant with other aspects of gentrification which generate social taxonomies, which enable the middle-classes to recognise one another and organise as a class. Butler and Robson suggest that colonisation may be an important element in transforming working-class neighbourhoods into middle-class enclaves (2001: 82). Once a primary school is “recast in their own image as a core social institution”, gentrifiers may be able to use it as a force to socialise others into the gentrified habitus, as well as a totem of community life and belonging (2001: 82). Urban schools themselves become important symbolic resources, and competitive stakes in the educational field, which confer a statement of place in the urban order for middle-class groups.

Another interesting element in Butler and Robson's extended discussion of “colonisation” is that it occurs in the context of gentrification amongst a self-consciously *liberal* fraction of the middle-class that espouses a narrative celebrating diversity. This reflects a wider ambivalence, which appears to infuse the gentrified habitus, in relation to differences of class and ethnicity. This is captured by Bauman in his dissection of late modern urban anxieties:

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<sup>7</sup> This concept is discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

City living is a notoriously ambivalent experience. It attracts and repels, but to make the plight of the city dweller more complex yet, it is the same aspects of city life that, intermittently or simultaneously, attract and repel. ... The confusing variety of the urban environment is a source of fear. ... The same kaleidoscope-like twinkle and glimmer of urban scenery, never short of novelty and surprise, constitute however its difficult-to-resist charm and seductive power. ... The city prompts *mixophilia* as much as, and simultaneously with, *mixophobia*. (2003: 111)

Thus, the very things that may have attracted this fraction to a certain neighbourhood, i.e. its ethnic and social diversity, are also the aspects which may be expunged in the process of colonisation. The American urban ethnographer Elijah Anderson has also extensively chronicled the ambivalent, and at times confrontational relations between white middle-class gentrifiers and black urban residents as they negotiate space and territory in the inner-cities (1990, 1999). Anderson suggests that for the white middle-class, proximity to poor urban blacks, brings a “variety of social complications and opportunities that may require new learning and cultural adaptation” (1990: 138).

Whilst Butler and Robson’s analysis is illuminating, their argument is mainly drawn from interviews with gentrifiers. The voices of non-gentrifiers and the perspectives of school staff are absent. From the institutional perspective, it is unclear how to account for the process of class colonisation. There is relatively little attention paid to the actions, practices and experiences of school staff in relation to urban middle-class parents’ cultural and social power, as they attempt to “negotiate their way in” and transform the educational arena (Butler and Robson, 2003b). Butler and Robson’s discussion suggests an *unhindered* process of middle-class takeover, yet the term colonisation evokes notions of struggle as well as hegemony. As the post-colonial theorist Loomba contends, regarding accounts of historical examples of colonialism, such a characterisation:

evacuates the word “colonialism” of any implication of an encounter between peoples, or of conquest and domination. There is no hint that the “new locality” may not be so “new” and that the process of “forming a community” might be somewhat unfair. (1998: 1-2)

It is perhaps apt that Butler and Robson use the metaphor of colonisation since, as Grace (whose work is discussed below) notes, the Victorian creators of urban schools drew upon such social imagery, evoking “military and colonising metaphors” (Grace,

1978: 29). However this was in reference to *schools* as colonising agents. In contrast, Butler and Robson's work implies that the flow of power moves in the other direction: from the middle-classes to the school. Maguire *et al.* suggest that such "colonised" schools may be seen as being *in* the inner city, but not *of* the inner city (2006: 5). But this perhaps begs the question of how middle-class dominance over urban schools is achieved and maintained. There is little sense in this literature of how urban schools might negotiate power relations and the context set by gentrification; for example, leadership within schools, reflected in the actions of heads, is taken as being largely supportive of middle-class parent action. In these respects, Butler and Robson's analysis leaves room for further investigation. The next section discusses the theme of urban schooling. It shows how the concerns expressed within this literature, centred on class power, mediation and contestation within urban schools, can usefully be set out in relation to gentrification and class colonisation.

### **2.3. *Understanding urban schools***

Having outlined the contemporary urban context of gentrification, I consider some influential ways of conceptualising urban *schools* as reflected in the works of Gerald Grace (1977, 1978, 2006) and Stuart Hall (1977) among others. These authors attend to the socio-historical location and role of urban schools in class relations, and the specific challenges this has generated for educators and pupils. According to Hall:

there has never been, in England, anything remotely approaching a "common" or "comprehensive" school experience for all children. Each kind of school has been absorbed into its socio-geographic segment, and taken on something of that imprint. (1977: 11)

He adds that within the inner-cities "stand the urban working-class schools, the beacons and landmarks of working-class education" (1977: 11). Grace (1978) argues that since their inception urban schools have been sites of contestation and conflict; for those who work in them and for those who are schooled within them. They have been, Grace claims, at the heart of efforts to address the potentiality and realities of social disorganisation; to "civilise" the masses and transmit the dominant culture and forms of knowledge. Importantly this suggests urban schools are interpolated within intersecting class relations:

They find themselves at the meeting point of classes; at the point where the “official” culture with its understanding, values and world view meets alternative realities; where middle-class prescription meets working-class resistance; where elaborated language meets directness and where the contradictions of liberal reform become apparent. (Grace, 1978: 53)

For a number of sociologists, urban schools have expressed important themes of class such as the issue of working-class students’ *educability* and the processes by which they are rendered *intelligible* within urban schools has been a locus of debate (Archer, 2008; Rist, 1977) – this has focused attention on educators’ response and experience of students’ needs and cultural expression (Becker, 1952; McLaren, 1993); and the content and transmission of *school knowledge*, and how it relates to the knowledge structures and symbolic forms of working-class life (Bernstein, 1971a; Young, 1971). From this perspective, educators’ personal formation, cultural and social identities, has been of theoretical and empirical significance in illuminating the contradictory and intersectional character of educational work within urban settings (Connolly, 1998; Maguire, 2005).

Whilst urban schools have changed since Grace’s earlier empirical study, the notion of the urban school as a site of class tension still has resonance. The population of inner-city schools still reflects the most impoverished, disadvantaged and powerless segments of society. Working in urban schools *still* presents educators with ideological challenges as they confront the inequalities of a class-stratified society, and the possibilities of change. Maguire’s (2001, 2005) work on the formation and enactments of teachers’ class identities and practices attests to the continuing relevance of approaching urban schools in this manner. Maguire expresses this theme thus:

Teaching in urban schools, wherever they are located, reveals, sometimes at a very basic level, the acute polarization in society; what Davies (1997: 305) calls “the undiscovered country of the poor,” And this “discovery” both produces and informs class consciousness. (2001: 325)

More recent accounts highlight the complex ways in which the issue of educability and intelligibility intersects with race, gender and class in urban teachers’ constructions of their work situation and students (Archer, 2008; Rollock, 2006; Youdell, 2003). Urban schools remain contested *boundary* objects at the *intersection* of divergent and emergent social realities; institutions entangled in various class tensions – social,

cultural, political, inter-personal and ideological – which frame relations amongst teachers; and between parents and teachers, pupils and teachers, teachers and other staff. The results are dynamic, ambiguous and ambivalent relations between urban schools and their localities and students. This theme is explicated by Hall:

[The urban school] did not “belong” to this working-class space at all. ... It stood, in essence, for values, for kinds of learning, for types of discipline and authority, it affirmed experiences altogether at variance with its natural environment. ... It linked the urban working-class zone to the wider society in ways which were connective but also disconnected. In this sense, the local urban school is a paradigm case: an institution which in its global meaning and vertical networks can clearly be seen, in however complex a way, to be a dominant institution, the institution of dominant culture: but which, in its horizontal connections, in its local and neighbourhood context, was *at the same time* part of a negotiated class culture. This mismatch between where these schools stood, and what they stood *for* was always a glaring one. (1977: 12-13)

There is thus ambiguity in the tension between urban schools and the working-class localities in which they stand; which sociological enquiry has identified as problematic for working-class pupils and their families (Bernstein, 1971b). The next section discusses the work of scholars who have begun to explore TAs’ work in urban schools, at a theoretical and empirical level.

## **2.4. Class-work in urban schools**

Reviewing literature on TAs’ and their effectiveness, Howes observes that:

support staff do extremely important work in the spaces left by the structures and formalities of schooling. Schools are sociocultural environments, in that they are social institutions affected by and affecting a variety of cultures and cultural issues. But these aspects of impact are more difficult to speak about, perhaps because most people still lack the language to reflect on the impact of ... culture. (2003: 149)

This points to the largely unexplored sociocultural dimension of TAs’ work and roles. Key to the study of TAs in urban settings has been the “funds of knowledge” theoretical framework developed in the USA. The concept was introduced by anthropologists Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) as part of their analysis of working-class Mexican households in the border zones of south-western United States. They sought to understand how historically-accumulated household resources

– knowledge, skills, and practices – were used by Mexican Americans to navigate everyday contexts. They argued, “these funds not only provide the basis for understanding the cultural systems from which U.S.-Mexican children emerge, but ... [are] important and useful assets in the classroom” (1992: 313). They hoped to challenge perceptions of minority households as having language and cultural *deficits* which they bring to the classroom. Their approach was intended to enable educators to appreciate and recognise students’ culture and identity as dynamic rather than static and simple, and incorporate this into pedagogic practices. Subsequent educational research has developed these ideas (e.g. Moll *et al.*, 1992; Moll and González, 1994), integrating insights from Vygotsky’s (1978) cultural-historical psychology, especially the concept of “cultural mediation”.

Several key studies of TAs’ sociocultural mediation have proceeded within this general framework. American scholars Lilia Monzó, Robert Rueda and associates have conducted a number of qualitative studies of TAs’ work in urban elementary schools serving predominantly working-class Latino/a groups, examining how the different cultural and social formation of teachers (generally white and middle-class) and TAs (Latino/a and working-class) shapes their interactions and social relationships in school (Monzó and Rueda, 2001; Rueda, Monzó and Arzubiaga, 2003). They argue that TAs, referred to as paraeducators, “provide an important source of expertise that ... is critical for students of diverse backgrounds, such as knowledge about students’ backgrounds, home lives, and communities” (Rueda, Monzó and Higareda, 2004: 54). In their research, they found that paraeducators’ conversational and gestural styles were more informal and “typically Latino/a” than those of teachers (of both Latino/a and Euro-American ethnicities). Assistants utilised their knowledge of the pressures and constraints faced by many of the children (arising, for instance, from living in deprived, stigmatised neighbourhoods) to sensitively interpret pupils’ behaviour for school staff (including teachers). They were able to effectively mediate between “official” school knowledge and curriculum content for Latino/a students by referencing pupils’ own culturally-specific experiences, concepts and existing knowledge, grounded in household cultural capital and social networks (i.e. “funds of knowledge”). Rueda *et al.* suggest that “this knowledge, when combined with pedagogical skills and a critical consciousness toward serving urban students, can make an important contribution to the development of effective learning contexts” (2004: 57).



Rueda and colleagues' findings were corroborated by the work of two sociolinguists working in the UK, Martin-Jones and Saxena (2003), who framed their analysis in a similar theoretical idiom. They report on the findings of a three-year multi-site ethnographic study of the Bilingual Teaching Assistant (BTA) role – comprising women of South Asian heritage – across a number of English primary schools. They identified several additional roles which BTAs performed in contrast to their monolingual colleagues. For example, BTAs used changes of language and linguistic registers in their interaction with minority ethnic pupils to provide contextualisation for curriculum activities in ways which “reflected an intimate knowledge of the children’s language preferences and experiences” (2003: 273); they were used by teachers as a subtle means of classroom control; allowed pupils to talk about their backgrounds and acknowledged the value of such conversations; and they acted as advocates for pupils with other staff members. Martin-Jones and Saxena add that “[BTAs] are able to build on the forms of knowledge and the cultural capital that children bring from home in ways in which few of the monolingual class teachers are able to do” (2003: 279). These findings are supported by Cable’s (2004) interview-based study of BTAs in urban primary schools. She concludes that BTAs “helped to give children a sense of identity through their sense of their own identities as bicultural and bilingual people living and working in the UK” (2004: 219). This clearly suggests assistants’ identities and their social and cultural backgrounds are an important consideration, and a basis on which their intermediary role is forged.

Working within a different theoretical paradigm, anthropologist Weiss (1994) has analysed the contributions made by TAs within urban schools in the US. He argues that TAs act as “cultural brokers” in urban settings where working-class and minority ethnic families may be alienated and excluded from mainstream institutions. Weiss suggests that they may be able to “subtly champion the views of the local community and to manipulate some of the realities of school life so that children and parents might profit from their exposure to an alien [and] bureaucratic ... educational system” which often views some urban families as culturally deficient (1994: 343). He also notes that TAs can utilise their ambiguous position in the institutional order to “reduce conflict and facilitate change” (Weiss, 1994: 338). These changes brought about by assistants are subtle and concern the symbolic and cultural order of social interactions and relations within urban schools, regarding “motivation, trust, self-esteem and a sense of

identity with the school” (1994: 343). Weiss notes that it is TAs’ “personal involvement that legitimises the school system and makes it answerable, as well as accessible, to community concerns” (1994: 342). It is in these less obvious ways that TAs’ personal investment, identities, cultural contribution can be seen.

#### **2.4.1. TAs’ institutional experiences and positioning**

Many of the studies reviewed above indicate that assistants’ social and cultural brokerage role is facilitated by their ambiguous position within institutional structures. This has been characterised by Weiss (1994) in terms of “social marginality”, and as “liminality” by Mansaray (2006). This evidence highlights the problematic character of TA-teacher relations in schools and their wider institutional experiences. As Cable observes: “the role of an intermediary or advocate is rarely a comfortable one, as it requires the person involved to both understand and be sensitive to different perspectives but also to be active in presenting often conflicting views or opinions” (2004: 220).

A number of studies have found that TAs are often marginalised, and the relationship between assistant and teacher is characterised by suppressed anxiety and confusion (Calder and Grieve, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997b; Weiss, 1994). Rueda and Monzó’s (2004) work suggests that the hierarchical character of TA-teacher relations is reinforced by particular institutional practices, such as exclusion from channels of communication and within settings such as staffrooms and meetings. Such practices of exclusion often result, according to Lowe and Pugh, in TAs internalising feelings of powerlessness. They argue that TAs “do not identify their role and position within the school to be deemed worthy of power” (2007: 27). Weiss argues that within an urban context, workplace occupational divisions are framed by TAs’ and teachers’ divergent neighbourhood class and cultural locations. This means that unequal power relations between assistants and teachers embedded in school cultures intersect and articulate with the class divisions of wider society. Weiss suggests the consequence of TAs’ marginal position and occupational subordination is that teachers do not view them as colleagues with shared professional interests: “teachers were always aware that the aides would never be teachers and that their shared concerns need not extend beyond the classroom” (1994: 339).

Whilst Weiss' work points to the different institutional positioning and experiences of TAs and teachers in urban contexts, he does not examine the more complex class contexts in gentrifying urban neighbourhoods, where middle-class individuals, plus those from working-class backgrounds, may occupy TA positions. Thus we may reconsider the articulations between urban schools and their communities, and the ways in which TAs' presence and actions alter and mediate this relationship. Moreover, a greater attention to TAs' perspectives might render their motivations, commitments and identifications more perspicuously. We know relatively little about the social, cultural and symbolic dimensions of TAs' *institutional* lives and the significance of their own identities. In addressing some of these gaps in our knowledge we may go some way in providing a sociological account of TAs' working lives. The next section summarises the limitations of the literature and elucidates the connective themes which they provide; and concludes with a discussion of the implications for the study.

#### **2.4.2. Limitations of the literature on TAs' sociocultural mediation**

Accounts of TAs' mediatory role and work within urban schools have contributed numerous insights: empirically, they have focused attention on TAs' roles and relationships within schools; and theoretically they have enriched our understanding of the social and cultural significance of assistants' work in urban settings. However, some topics remain underdeveloped in the literature and require further investigation.

Firstly, the focus of much of the analysis has been on TAs' and pupils' interactions and relations, and less on adult social relations between educators. There has been less emphasis on how TAs' presence contributes to, and alters, the social and cultural texture of institutional realities in urban schools as *workplaces*. The institutional dimension of TAs' work situation and the factors which influence their occupational experiences remain thinly-sketched and under-theorised; in particular, the character of the interconnections between TAs' positioning within the narrower institutional landscape and the broader urban social space. As Rueda and Monzó acknowledge:

We need to know more clearly how age, experience, gender, and culture impact the relationship between teacher and paraeducator. We especially need a better understanding of the specific ways in which diverse "funds of

knowledge” may be de-legitimized and/or supported by school cultures. (2002: 519)

Secondly, the urban localities in which most of these studies have been conducted, particularly those from the US, tend to be more culturally, ethnically or racially homogenous and undifferentiated in terms of class than perhaps in the UK. This is partly due to the different ethno-racial histories of the UK and the US, and the higher levels of ethnic and racial segregation within American urban localities (Cutler, Glaeser and Vigdor, 2005; Patterson, 2005; Peach, 2005; Phillips, 1998). Hence less attention has been given to the interplay of class, ethno-linguistic and cultural factors in assistants’ roles. Whilst there are good grounds for focusing on Latino/a assistants in the US context, and bilingual TAs in the UK, where ethno-linguistic difference presents a clear cultural marker, there is a risk of reifying these differences and essentialising the groups concerned (1994). An exception is the work of Karla Lewis, who studied three urban primary schools in racially-contrasting neighbourhoods in the US, and found that the mediatory role was present even in schools where the assistants did not share the same ethnic/racial identities as the pupils and their families. This led Lewis to conclude: “instructional aides can be a bridge to the school community; however, the bridge concept needs to be redefined to include those who are not the same ‘race’ or ethnicity as their students” (2003: 16). She also found that whilst some TAs were understanding of pupils’ cultural backgrounds and the constraints on their lives (such as poverty), others espoused a discourse of “cultural deficiency”, blaming students’ problems on broken homes, single mothers and other culturally-stereotyped traits. Lewis comments that her study “indicates that you don’t have to be middle-class to have these perceptions” (2003: 18). This suggests greater complexity to be unravelled within more diverse empirical urban contexts. Following on from this point, the literature does not address differences of class background, ethnicity, gender and locality formation *amongst* TAs, and the implications thereof for institutional identities and positioning. Few of the studies document and critically engage with TAs’ lived experiences of shifting occupational identities at work.

Theoretically, much of the literature has focused on the recognition of students’ funds of knowledge, and not addressed power relations within educational institutions and urban localities. There is not always a full appreciation of how wider social relations of power at various levels – the socio-political, the neighbourhood, the institutional and

the interactional – interpolate TAs’ identities and shape their practices and perspectives. Funds of knowledge are complex resources which need to be approached in a more sophisticated way and allied to a theory of power. This inattention to issues of power restricts the potential for critique.

## **2.5. Summary and implications for the study**

This chapter has situated the study of TAs’ working lives within various debates and themes in the sociology of education, urban schooling and sociocultural mediation. A number of key ideas and different bodies of literature emerge.

Firstly, I examined the accounts of social change in urban contexts provided by scholars of gentrification. Gentrification as class colonisation is a key problematic and focus of the thesis. Gentrification is about encounters and identifications, real and imagined, between the social, cultural and ideological worlds of the middle-classes and those of the urban working-classes. Most importantly it draws attention to their relational character, to class relations as complex, contested phenomena in urban contexts. Class colonisation requires a more nuanced understanding of how urban primary schools operate and the ways in which class relations are institutionally re-contextualised. This insight was developed in relation to sociological conceptualisations of urban schooling, which emphasised the tensions “*arising out of socio-political contradictions and ... a continuing struggle between agencies for hegemonic domination and forms of resistance generated by various groups to such domination*” (Grace, 1984: 35 emphasis in original). Thus, colonisation must be considered in relation to existing power relations between urban schools and their localities, and how these are negotiated.

Secondly, the discussion moved onto TAs’ role and *class-work* within urban schools, and its potentially exclusive/inclusive implications. These accounts drew attention to TAs’ identities and positions within urban localities (as residents, members of cultural groups, etc.) as a basis for sociocultural intermediation between students and teachers, parents and teachers, etc. Several studies were informed by the “funds of knowledge” approach, which did not sufficiently address issues of power within schooling. Nonetheless, this literature has drawn an empirical and theoretical profile of assistants’ potential and actual contributions within urban schools.

We are now in a position to appreciate the articulations between the various themes presented in this chapter and the intellectual space specified. Urban schools are highly significant spaces in which to explore, theoretically and empirically, how aspects of gentrification are manifested in concrete social interactions. Studying class relations within schools and their localities underlines the notion that class is “lived in its specificity in particular cultural and geographical locations” (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001: 53). There are significant differences *within* as well as *between* classes, which are revealed by attending to cultural and social formations of class in a particular place and time, and the coherence of their empirical identification<sup>8</sup>. TAs’ work and identities are particularly revealing in this regard because they are at the boundaries and intersections of various connective processes. As Mary Douglas indicates, there is “energy in [society’s] ... margins and unstructured areas” (1966: 140). Gentrification provides an agenda that is likely to increase the diversity of TAs, who have traditionally been drawn from the local working-classes; as middle-class residents from the locality increasingly take up positions as TAs, the nature of institutional relations amongst TAs, and between TAs and teachers is likely to change. The shape these changes take will be determined, in part, by how differences – such as occupational histories, class backgrounds, skills and relations to the neighbourhood – are understood, enacted and reconciled within the workplace. Of particular relevance will be the role of headship in mediating *boundary* relations between schools and their localities. Focusing on TAs’ working lives shifts our attention to the interior of school life, but also the borders, and how schools manage and reconstitute flows of cultural, social and symbolic power from their localities. TAs’ work as a boundary-mediating phenomenon provides an excellent opportunity, taking into account the potentially liminal nature of their identities and professional and personal formations, to explore how boundaries, distinctions and categories of inclusion and exclusion are reproduced and challenged through schooling processes for educators.

The study of TAs’ working lives therefore offers a relatively unexplored terrain. What is needed therefore is a *theorised* understanding of the constraints and possibilities realised in particular institutional and cultural arrangements within urban primary

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<sup>8</sup> The underlying analytical conceptualisation of class used in this study is explicated in the next chapter as part of the broader theoretical framework.

schools, and how these are structured by neighbourhood social relations of class. The development of such a theory is the task of the next of chapter.

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## Chapter 3 – Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

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What is the point of theory? ... Theory is destructive, disruptive and violent. It offers a language for challenge, and modes of thought, other than those articulated for us by dominant others. It provides a language of rigour and irony rather than contingency. The purpose of such theory is to de-familiarise present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary, and to open up spaces for the invention of new forms of experience. (Ball, 1995: 266)

In this chapter I develop a framework – drawing from the work of Bourdieu, Goffman and Collins – for generating a critical theory that will empirically elucidate the substantive themes of this study, particularly its concern with issues of structuration, power and action. This will facilitate an examination of the cultural and symbolic landscapes of schooling and TAs' positions, and contributions therein, as well as providing a basis for wider comparative macro-analysis around gentrification as an aspect of class-education articulation.

The first part of the chapter discusses Bourdieu's relational theory of practice, with its associated concepts of *habitus*, *fields* and *capitals*, and how it might be used to provide an account of social formations of class and relations of power. Arguably a key limitation in Bourdieu's work is *situated agency* – which is reflected in his ambiguous exposition of *habitus*. His work however can be enhanced by some of the insights from the micro-sociological approach of Goffman and Collins, namely their concept of *interaction ritual*. This is developed as a way of gaining traction on agency and identity within the social world, and elucidating the symbolic aspects of social relations as they are constituted through everyday interactions. Interaction rituals can illuminate TAs' institutional interactions and identities, and their contribution to school level institutional solidarity or fragmentation. The chapter concludes with an outline of the implications of the theoretical framework for the study.

### 3.1. **Bourdieu's theory of practice**

Bourdieu's central concepts are capitals, habitus and field. He frequently uses a "game" analogy to expound his view of social life and the interconnections between his



concepts. This is as good a way as any of beginning to grasp the fundamentals of his thought. Bourdieu views social life as a sporting game (i.e. *field*) in which players struggle and compete for position and advantage. Players have *stakes* in the sense of having *interests* in the game – they take it to be real and worth playing – and also in the sense of *stakes* as prizes (*capitals*) to be won or deployed as a product of competition (market). Players may enact different moves (*strategies*) to gain advantage and this in part will be determined by their previous experience of the game and their preparedness for it (*habitus*) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98-100).

The three main concepts of habitus, capitals and fields are key to Bourdieu's *relational* sociology. This means a number of things. Firstly, that his concepts are defined in an interconnected manner and intended to be theorised simultaneously rather than apart. Secondly, they have to be explicated constantly in relation to their effective empirical deployment; they must be put in "motion" and made to "work" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This is what Bourdieu means when he refers to his concepts as "open concepts designed to guide empirical work" and this is the spirit in which they are used within this study (1990a: 107). Thirdly, Bourdieu's relational approach is an account of the "real"; an ontological and epistemological account of how sociological theory constructs its objects and his own emphasis on relations and processes against a phenomenology of the subject (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97).

For Bourdieu, individuals and groups are endowed with various types and volumes of what he terms *capital*. These are resources or power. There are three main forms of capital: economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is wealth and income, institutionalised in property rights and ownership, and is exchangeable in the market economy. However, Bourdieu is concerned to show that, in fact, economic capital and notions of "profit" and strategy are not confined to the sphere of market and production relations, but present in all facets of social life<sup>9</sup>. Sociological accounts therefore have to be sensitive to the ways in which economic capital is transformed into other resources which are "not and cannot be socially recognised as economic" (1986: 47); namely as cultural and social forms of power.

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<sup>9</sup> Whether or not other forms of capital are theoretically or empirically reducible to the workings of economic capital is a contentious aspect of Bourdieu's work (see Lebaron, 2003; Swartz, 1997)

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is manifested in a number of dynamic ways, broadly: an embodied state, representing relatively enduring dispositions of mind and body and schemes of thought such as ways of speaking, eating, knowledge, and bodily comportment (Shilling, 1993: 127-149); an institutionalised state that exists in dominant institutions within society, for example as in the case of educational qualifications; and an objectified state in the form of books and other cultural goods. Linguistic capital is a subtype of embodied cultural capital, and refers to ways of deciphering complex linguistic codes, forms of address, and the possession of valorised accents.

Social capital refers to the resources and opportunities available to an individual in virtue of belonging to particular networks and associations of trust and reciprocity. It thus enhances an individual's capacity for action. The total volume of social capital available to an individual is a function not only of those networks (and their magnitude), but the cultural and symbolic capital of other individuals within the network. Social capital can also enhance the accumulation of other forms of capitals (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Schuller, Baron and Field, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). It is also important to note that there is a difference between *possessing* and *activating* capitals: "people who have social and cultural capital may choose to activate capital or not, and they vary in the skill with which they activate it" (Lareau and Horvat, 1999: 38).

*Habitus* mediates between the individual consciousness expressing dispositions and the structural elements of society (i.e. fields). Fields are arenas of competition for capitals in which individuals or groups occupy dominant or dominated positions. The habitus is the mental structures through which people manage the social world. It is the durable dispositions which shape an individual's consciousness, unifying and, when enacted, embodying their cultural and social inheritance. The habitus, according to Bourdieu (1990b: 56), is "embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product"; thus part of the work of social analysis is to explicate that very history. A further aspect of the relation between habitus and fields is *doxa*. Doxa describes an individual's commitment to the presuppositions of the field, or what Bourdieu refers to as a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990b: 66). This occurs when an individual's "objective" position within the

configurations of a field is congruent with the habitus or internal mental structures. The social world is perceived as natural and taken-for-granted. This contributes to the reproduction of social structures because it results in “an adherence to relations of order which ... are accepted as self-evident” (Bourdieu, 1984: 471).

*Fields* provide something like a magnetic attraction for those who are predisposed (have the requisite habitus) for them. Struggles and competition centre on the utilisation of existing forms of capital, and the ability to define the forms of capital operative in a particular field, and the legitimated strategies which can be used to obtain them. For Bourdieu, struggle and competition are the engines of social life as individuals and groups pursue their self-interests. In other words, fields are relatively stable contexts for transforming dispositions (habitus) into activated, motivated actions which in turn become practices. According to Swartz, field is “a spatial metaphor ... [that] suggests rank and hierarchy”, and interactions within fields are shaped by individuals’ or groups’ location in the topography of dominated and dominant positions (1997: 120). The existence of capitals, their value and efficacy, is partly determined by fields. Depending on the particular field, any cultural or social marker or resource can serve as a form of capital and it is individuals’ or groups’ structured practices which make a field what it is. In highly pluralistic and differentiated societies such as ours, there are numerous (sub)-fields and correspondingly differentiated forms of capital<sup>10</sup>. However, Bourdieu suggests that there is a hierarchy of fields (and sub-fields), and that some fields, such as education, which serve basic societal selection and marking functions, are more important and determining than others (Swartz, 1997: 136-142).

Together these three concepts and their interconnections ground Bourdieu’s theory of practice and action. They reflect his concern to show that socialisation processes work in different ways for different groups, which places them within competitive status hierarchies, in which dominance of some against others is legitimised. The next section discusses Bourdieu’s theory of practice as applied to his accounts of class formation, conflict and power. This provides analytical purchase for the empirical identification and understanding of class relations as they might be embodied in TAs’ working lives, institutional experiences and school-neighbourhood relations.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, see Reay’s (2004b) development of *emotional capital* and Shah et al.’s (2010) use of *ethnic capital* (2010).

### 3.1.1. Class formation and power

Bourdieu's notion of social class follows from his general approach. Broadly conceived classes are defined in relation to their positions in the social space, which is determined by their possession of capital (of differing type and volume). Class is therefore *compositionally complex*, encompassing the economic, social, cultural and symbolic. A class is a collective of individuals who share homologous positions in the social space. Empirically it can be explicated in terms of nuanced *class fractions* that are coherently identifiable. As Bourdieu adds: "In the reality of the social world, there are no more clear-cut boundaries, no more absolute breaks, than there are in the physical world" (1987: 13). In Bourdieu's account, class formation and power are to be understood as part of wider struggles for capitals amongst social groups in a hierarchical social space. *Class power* involves social closure, monopolisation of resources and other mechanisms for hoarding opportunities (Tilly, 1998). Class fractions, for Bourdieu, differ in their evaluative dispositions and experience-based schema that generate practices. This is because "both normative and cognitive orientations are linked to class and occupational positions because shared experiences associated with these positions are generalised by social learning and shaped into enduring dispositions" (DiMaggio, 2001: 545).

Bourdieu suggests that cultural conflicts are expressions of class conflicts and "each habitus embodies both the material conditions of existence of the class and the symbolic differentiations ... that categorise and rank its relation to other classes" (Swartz, 1997: 163). Class relations for Bourdieu are structurally oppositional, and thus class dispositions and identities are oppositional and relational (e.g. the middle-class is constituted by what it is not in relation to the working-class etc.). Class struggle in his account is the way individuals and groups, consciously and unconsciously, pursue their interests using various strategies to maintain or improve their positions in the stratification order in various fields. However, due to the prior unequal distribution, in volume and type, of capital, the "profits" to be had from pursuing various kinds of strategies will not have the same consequences for everyone (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1995; Butler and Robson, 2003c). *Class power*, for Bourdieu, stems in part from the ability of social groups to dominate the classification (e.g. symbols, images, texts, language) systems within a field of struggle as well as monopolising material resources.

In fact, Bourdieu suggests that class formation and mobilisation occur insofar as members of a group recognise each other under a classification and are able to strategically alter those classifications. Social taxonomies are therefore very important for Bourdieu. Struggles over systems of meanings and their definitions are an important aspect of class struggles. Only when a social group has categories of representation, and mutual recognition of those, can it mobilise as a class.

The exercise and consequences of representational power are referred to as *symbolic capital*. Symbolic capital is not strictly a form of capital in the sense given to cultural and social resources, but rather something which frequently accompanies the use of these other capitals. As Bourdieu notes, it often obscures the “mode of acquisition” of other forms of capital (1984: 68). This is to say that the exercise of power requires some kind of *justification* or *legitimation* and this is what the notion of symbolic capital captures. Symbolic capital is, to paraphrase Thompson in his discussion of ideology, meaning in the service of power (Thompson, 1990: 7). Thus, insofar as a form of social or cultural capital is deemed legitimate, naturalised and recognised, it becomes symbolic capital. The ability of those in more powerful positions to present unequal economic and social relations as fair and meritocratic and their actions and practices as disinterested is a function of the legitimating and ideological function of symbolic capital. Individuals may therefore come to *misrecognise* key aspects of their social experiences and their connection to socially-produced inequalities. For example, the educational system consecrates what is fundamentally arbitrary knowledge “under the guise of neutrality ... [which favours] the groups, classes whose cultural arbitrary it reproduces” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977/1990: 67). Arguably for Bourdieu, the true nature of symbolic capital is generally misrecognised in the lived realm of actions, it is always *ideological*, and misperceived, insofar as it is symbolic capital.

Bourdieu considers the consequences of symbolic capital, for those occupying dominated positions, as *symbolic violence*. Symbolic violence is the effects and exercise of symbolic capital on those subjected to it. The efficacy of this violence stems also from the fact that those subject to it are complicit. In other words, misrecognition articulates with social control through self-regulation mediated by the habitus. The habitus of dominated groups provide them with a sense of their place, and what they perceive as intelligible, possible or impossible. There is a constriction of subjective

horizons (and thereby alignment with “objective probabilities”), so that individuals who are subjected to such powers come to believe that certain things are not for the “likes of us”. As Grenfell and James add, “What is thinkable and unthinkable, expressible and inexpressible, and valued or not, is the product of the field structures within which they arise and the principles of legitimation operating there” (2004: 509). Thus, for Bourdieu, the analysis and explication of symbolic power is immensely important, in order to expose where, when and how it serves a concealing function as violence in the social world. For Bourdieu (1992) critique is possible only through social analysis and his own meta-theoretic praxis<sup>11</sup>.

Although Bourdieu focused on social divisions and formations of class, his general approach can be developed and applied to gender, race, ethnicity and locality as important aspects of social structuring (e.g. Connolly, 1998; Lareau, 2002; McGregor, 2004). The relationship between different social divisions is complex and multifaceted; however it is clear that insofar as race, ethnicity, gender and geographical location are part of initial classed socialising conditions of the habitus, then they are also socially, culturally and symbolically encoded. In fact, Bourdieu suggests that the location of individuals and groups in social space is partly dependent on their geographic location – because *where* you are spatially will in part determine what assets can be appropriated. Thus, specifying the habitus and its social trajectory must include not only a “group’s real social distance from certain assets [but] must integrate the geographical distance, which itself depends on the group’s spatial distribution and, more precisely, its distribution with respect to the ‘focal point’ of economic and cultural values” (Bourdieu, 1984: 124). It thus follows that class location will be mediated and expressed through these other intersecting social divisions. Bourdieu’s framework is sufficiently flexible in this respect. The next section briefly summarises the key strengths and limitations of Bourdieu’s work for this thesis, before elaborating on how his relational approach can be complemented by the micro-sociological perspective of Goffman and Collins.

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<sup>11</sup> Kim (2004) offers an insightful critique of the epistemologically privileged status of Bourdieu’s theory in this regard.

### **3.1.2. Strengths and limitations of Bourdieu's work for this study**

Bourdieu's discussion of class power and habitus is significant for this study because it provides a way of specifying the class location of informants by pointing to the features of individuals' backgrounds and trajectories (what he refers to as "subject positions"), providing them with the resources as structures of opportunity to act (expressed as capitals), interests to be realised, decisions to be made, ends to be pursued (strategies) and, thus, opportunities to accrue or gain further "profits" within fields (e.g. housing and education etc.). Individuals and groups draw upon a variety of cultural, social, economic and symbolic resources in order to maintain or advance their position in the social order. The notion of a class habitus as a shared set of orientations, dispositions, habits, practices amongst individuals who emanate from homologous locations in a social space can facilitate a mapping of the commonalities and differences amongst TAs' and how these might be transposed into the institutional contexts of schooling.

Whilst enormously influential and significant, Bourdieu's work has some limitations which are problematic in the context of this study. These stem from over-emphasis on the socially reproductive character of the habitus. As an account of *individual* agency it tends to assume action occurs in closed systems. The dialectic of struggle and competition within social fields has a tendency to reproduce rather than develop or transform practices and actions. If this is the case, then it is unclear how social change, human creativity, resistance, subversion and other forms of action common to occupational and social life might be illuminated in the working lives of TAs. In addition, much of the habitus (its generative structures) remains unconscious and unreflexive. Bourdieu argues that the "schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will" (1984: 466). Jenkins suggests that "it is difficult to know where to place conscious deliberation and awareness in Bourdieu's scheme of things" (1992: 77). For Bourdieu, change is possible only through transpositions or breaks, when the habitus, with its original dispositions, encounters a new field, and less often, when the habitus is reconstructed, or brought to consciousness, by what he refers to as "socio-analysis".

A number of commentators have defended, elaborated and developed Bourdieu's notion of habitus to incorporate a richer sense of agency (Crossley, 2001), particularly feminist researchers (Adkins, 2004; Bland, 2004; Reay, 1995). Reay has argued that the habitus places limits to action but is also capable of flexibility and innovation in practices, adding that the "habitus can be viewed as a complex internalized core from which everyday experiences emanate" (2004c: 435). Other theorists such as Lahire (2003) suggest that the habitus should be conceptualised in the plural, and individuals must be thought of as having multiple habitus(es) which come into play in different settings. He suggests that individuals have multiple investments, or stakes in the social world. Hodkinson (1998) has noted, in his study of the career decision-making processes of school leavers, that Bourdieu has little to say about the particular habitus of *individuals*, and instead draws upon psycho-social cognitive notions of schemata, as guides to action, to elaborate a more flexible notion of habitus which is sensitive to the specificities in relation to individual life histories and narratives. Overall, these interventions emphasise that the habitus is *dispositional* and not *deterministic* (Mills, 2008; Reay, 2004c). However, these elaborations of the agentic aspects of the habitus elide a larger difficulty found in Bourdieu, which is about the specification of the *relationship* between the collective and individual aspects of the habitus and therefore *location* of agency. Bourdieu's exposition tends to focus on the structural features of habitus, and thus confuses, to paraphrase Goffman (1967/2005: 149), where the "interaction" is; is it at the macro-level of fields and social relations or at the level of human practice and agency? Bourdieu seems at best ambivalent about the answer. At times, his comments suggest a thorough structuralism and it is not difficult to see why he can be interpreted in this way: "[the] real is the relational: what exist in the social world are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals but objective relations" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). There is an ambiguity between social relations and interactions in the abstraction and as they are experienced and negotiated at the *interpersonal* level. Bourdieu appears at various junctures to conflate situational stratification and action, expressive of dominance in concrete social interactions with positioning in the macro-social space. As Crossley, a sympathetic expositor of Bourdieu's work points out:

[Bourdieu] allows the concept of the habitus, for the most part, to pre-empt his conception of agency ... Indeed sometimes he substitutes the habitus for the agent ... [This] can both mislead and create problems. It is not habits that



act, after all, but rather agents. Similarly, it is not habits that improvise but again agents. (2001: 94-95)

Similarly, Lane notes: “if agents are *a priori* assumed to enjoy a pre-reflexive relationship to their social world then their capacity to act on that world through rational action must be considered severely limited” (2000: 196). Overall, this results in a concomitant neglect of the interpersonal micro-level of social experience. Or, rather, his sociological concepts do not sufficiently differentiate between the situational contexts, and their constitutive powers, in which individuals act. There is a flatness to the Bourdieusian account of the social world which confronts individuals and its experiential content, and an emphasis on the unconscious constraints and capacities given in the habitus. It is for this reason that Jenkins argues that Bourdieu “does not take seriously enough the difference between people and institutions” (1992: 89). Bourdieu at times stresses the determining character of the primary habitus developed in the family (or re-socialised in the educational system) and does not attend to other opportunities and possibilities for structuration, particularly those present in working life. Equally, Bourdieu’s work does not always attend to enactments of group membership, how individuals understand and perform their social and cultural identities (e.g. race/ethnicity) – and thus how *sectionality* comes into play.

There is therefore a need for a mediating *mechanism* which links the individual habitus, and activation of capitals, in everyday encounters, at the micro-level, and the wider social structures at the macro-level of social relations within fields. This, I will argue, is provided by Goffman and Collins’s concept of *interaction ritual* (Collins, 2004; Goffman, 1967/2005). This concept and the general micro-sociological approach from which it emanates focuses our attention on the significance of social interactions and the construction of self in on-going negotiated contexts in a way which complements Bourdieu’s explanatory framework. The micro-sociological position highlights a mediating level of enquiry and mechanism, between habitus and structures, that permits a more *textured* rendering of intersubjective experience than Bourdieu alone seems to offer. Such a focus is particularly consonant with an ethnographic concern with the observation and interpretation of localised meanings and interactions in schools.

### **3.2.      *The interaction ritual: Goffman and Collins***

This section introduces a different conceptualisation of agency and action, as grounded in individuals' emotionally-situated interactions, in the works of Goffman and Collins<sup>12</sup>. Their notion of interaction ritual can illuminate the shifting contours of TAs' experiences, identities and perspectives in varied institutional settings – for example, within classrooms, staffrooms, playgrounds, etc. – as they engage in different kinds of activities and interactions. It has heuristic power to highlight the conditions under which symbols of group membership arise, and the institutional consequences for solidarity, conflict, and fragmentation. This will enable a focus on how institutional realities and routines are impacted by the changing cultural and social conditions set by gentrification.

Goffman's approach to the study of social life, whilst often said to be idiosyncratic and lacking in systematisation, is evocative, draws deeply and extensively on ethnography and is widely recognised as being a highly original and influential contribution to the sociological enterprise (Fine and Manning, 2000). According to Manning, "Goffman's sociology has much to tell us about the relationships between social order and the affirmation of self" (1976: 14). For Goffman, it is through social interaction that our identities are produced, negotiated, contested, and the social order itself is reproduced. Situated interactions provide contexts for institutional enactments and opportunities where individuals may redefine the institutional reality and their positions in it, not only for themselves but for wider group memberships.

For Goffman, all encounters and social interactions generate an emergent social reality of an interpersonal kind, what he refers to as "interaction order" (Goffman, 1983; Rawls, 1987). This occurs as participants enter into each other's visual and aural field and become aware of each other's embodied presence. Each participant becomes an embodied object of perception for another, a subject who perceives the other. As well as being able to communicate through talk to one another, each participant is able to perceive and react to the other's non-verbal cues, gestures, and other bodily and

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<sup>12</sup> There are differences between Goffman and Collins, and what follows should not imply otherwise. My appropriations are largely heuristic rather than exegetical. Technically Collins refers to his concept as "interaction ritual chains" to differentiate it from Goffman's characterisation of "interaction ritual" but for expository purposes, I have collapsed both terms into a synthesised concept of "interaction ritual".

emotional signs. This process is iterative and creates a shared focus of attention that provides “the precondition for ... the sustained, intimate coordination of action, whether in support of closely collaborative tasks or as a means of accommodating closely adjacent ones” (Goffman, 1983: 3). When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. Within any interaction ritual, each participant “effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others” about what sort of interaction she takes it to be – a casual conversation between friends, a work meeting between teachers-TAs etc. (Goffman, 1969/1990: 23). In so doing, this establishes what Scheff describes as a *basic social bond*.

A normal social bond involves what Goffman calls “reciprocal ratification” of each of the parties by the other as “legitimate participants” in the relationship. Although Goffman was thinking only of face-to-face interaction, his description is useful as a starting point for describing an intact social bond, whether the participants are co-present or not. ... As Goffman and others have argued, effective social encounters may result in a “single focus of thought and visual attention”, which I call attunement. By attunement I mean a mutual understanding that is not only mental but also emotional. I do not mean agreement but rather empathic intersubjectivity: mind reading. Such attunement can occur as easily in conflict as in cooperation. (1994: 7)

This basic social bond arises from mutual awareness of a shared focus amongst participants, usually achieved through talk, a shared emotional mood and entrainment, which results in the symbolisation of participants’ experiences and lends the sense of “reality” to an encounter (Collins, 2004: 1-46; Goffman, 1967/2005). A basic social bond therefore is an accomplishment which establishes the grounds of mutual intelligibility – intersubjectively arrived at – through which conflict and cooperation can be negotiated. In addition, repeated interactions mean that a group begins to develop symbols of itself (e.g. words, phrases, symbols, values, etc.) which have the potential to function as particularised forms of *cultural capital*. These particularised forms of cultural and symbolic capital can be deployed as part of the on-going attempts to define and represent group membership.

As Scheff notes above, emotions are a very important aspect of this process. Collins argues that: “rituals are made with emotional ingredients, and they produce other

sorts of emotions (especially moral solidarity, but also sometimes aggressive emotions) as outcomes” (1990: 29). For Goffman, emotional expression and cues, and the reciprocal responses which they engender, are an integral part of the interaction process, and “fit so precisely into the logic of the ritual game that it would seem difficult to understand them without it” (1967/2005: 23). Equally for Collins emotions drive agency as *embodied energy* which gives the intensity and focus to consciousness. In a similar vein to forms of capital, emotional energy circulates through the on-going series of encounters or interaction rituals that individuals experience (2004: 6). Collins adds: “culture is socially alive only when rituals are successful, that is, when the situational ingredients exist to make rituals emotionally intense and cognitively focused” (2004: 31). The emotional charge of ritual experience also shapes mental representations, as Collins elaborates:

Rituals shape cognitions. The main objects or ideas that were the focus of attention during a successful ritual become loaded with emotional overtones. Those ideas or things become symbols: whatever else the ideas may refer to on a mundane level, there is also a deeper Durkheimian level on which symbols invoke membership in the group that charged them up with ritual significance. It is in this way that society gets inside the individual’s mind. (1990: 34)

In sum, an interaction ritual represents an emotionally motivated intersubjective reality achieved through mutual coordinating and calibration of talk and bodily responses, much like a conversation<sup>13</sup>. Symbols charged with emotional energy become internalised and circulate in social networks which reinforce and reify their existence. In the next section, I discuss how interaction rituals provide a performative and emotionally moving context for the construction and enactment of identities and solidarities, and indicate how this might be used to explore the contexts of gentrifying social class formation.

### **3.2.1. Identity, habitus and cultural style**

In any situated interaction, and as part of its successful accomplishment, a significant proportion of communication will be conducted through talk, but also through gestures, emotional signs, comportment and so on. This will therefore necessarily

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, Collins’ earlier presentation of his theory draws heavily on a conversational model of interaction (1975: 111-160).

communicate something about that individual's self, "out of which he and the others fashion an image of him ... A situated self, then awaits the individual" (Goffman, 1972: 85). In essence an identity or self, through which they are known and which they know others. For Goffman, the self consists partly of an awareness of the role (what he variously referred to as a "front" or "face") that is performed in a given interaction ritual (1969/1990: 13-16). These performances are a form of impression management by which people consciously and subconsciously modify their behaviour to influence the impression other people have of them and vice versa. The situated self is accomplished within an interaction ritual by managing one's own projection of self (*demeanour*), and giving *deference* to the self-image of others (Goffman, 1956). Just as we need others to sustain an interpersonal reality, we need others to validate or honour our self-concept through its dramatisation. This is a reciprocal and reciprocated social need. This is to say, identities are social accomplishments that have to be worked at through interactions. Interaction rituals provide the *performative* context for the enactment of identities.

In order to dramatically realise their identities individuals utilise control over what Goffman refers to as "expressive equipment" to convey and express a particular self within a social interaction. For Goffman (1969/1990: 14):

[the] expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give an impression) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*.

The signs that an individual *gives* refer to language (e.g. what is said, the explicit and intended aspects of communication) whilst what they *give off* refer to a wider range of actions, signs, which "others take as symptomatic of the actor" (1969/1990: 14). These latter include body size, gestures, comportment, clothing, posture, accent, speech pattern and the like. These resources in general, as controlled received messages cannot, or are difficult to, consciously fully manipulate within an interaction (1969/1990: 34). These more embodied symptomatic aspects of expressivity can be approached and interpreted as complementary features of Bourdieu's (1984: 474) concepts of habitus and cultural capital. They constitute what Bourdieu refers to as corporeal "hexis"; bodily dispositions, ways of comportment, accent etc.; *embodied*

*cultural capital*<sup>14</sup>; those “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” which are acquired, and cultivated over time, and most closely linked to the person (Bourdieu, 1986: 47). Individuals will use their acquired embodied cultural capital (what in Goffman’s terms is part of their “expressive equipment”) to craft the performances of their identities within interactions through techniques of “self-presentation” or “impression management” and with varying levels of accomplishment (expressivity). In other words, expressivity is an agentic capacity of the habitus. As Hallett argues, embodied cultural capital is not an identity *per se*, but rather a discursive space from which potential identities are generated.

It is not a “core self” or a stable set of identities. It is a taken-for-granted base on which we build a presentation of self. At the same time, when people are cognisant they can use impression management to accentuate or diminish certain characteristics. However, this cultural capital cannot be discarded because it is embodied, and it is difficult to present an image based on capital that one does not have. (Hallett, 2007: 153)

Embodied cultural capital therefore provides the primary resources of an individual’s expressive repertoire, which in turn specifies some of the social and cultural possibilities of what can be accomplished through identity-work in any given interaction. Equally, none of these possibilities are realisable if they are not reciprocally recognised by others. For example, I would have extreme difficulties realising a presentation of self as “white woman”.

In addition, there are also other resources which individuals can utilise such as features of the “scenery” within a setting of a ritual – backdrops, furniture, spatial arrangements etc. – which may or may not be under the control of (some) participants (e.g. the way authority figures’ offices project and support the power in their role). We could usefully refer to the deployment and enactment of embodied capital as *cultural style*. That is say, the particular constellations of strategies that a participant deploys, how they make use of their own personal biography, experiences, features of the settings, in addition to the unconscious elements of the habitus, other resources (e.g. using their physique to intimidate, seduce, charm, etc.) in their self-presentation and construction of identities. There is then a complex dialectic between individuals’ creative agency and capacity to craft identities and the constraints imposed by the

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<sup>14</sup> This includes linguistic capital, which is an aspect of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

habitus *and* their social need for acceptance and recognition. Identities are always therefore dynamic and continually negotiated. Moreover, for some groups who occupy dominated positions in the wider social space (i.e. fields), their self-presentation and the resources which they draw upon might be viewed and valued differently. For example, a number of studies in the US highlight the difficulties middle-class African-Americans have in signalling their *class* identity within interactions, as parents in relation to teachers (Lareau, 2002) and in public spaces (Anderson, 1990, 2004; Lacy, 2007). This is because their racial status tends to be the main perceptual “master-status” that “overpower[s], in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it” (Hughes, 1945: 357). Thus, we can see how Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital and violence works through identity and its articulation with our social need for self-validation within the lived realm of actions. In granting deference to and acceptance of the social ranks of honourability (or not as may be the case of black Americans) individuals are engaged in the process of misrecognition. That is to say, ascribing value and worth to a particular embodied cultural capital, of the privileged, and viewing it as natural, rather than seeing it as a social accomplishment as any other (and therefore, an action and judgement in which they are complicit). This obscures the social basis of privilege and inequalities, and the power of the privileged remains hidden. Thus, the fact that middle-class black Americans do not appear to benefit from the same class privileges, highlights that their class position is not seen as *legitimate* in the same way, and therefore not valued in the same way, and that implicitly their cultural styles are judged (and evaluated negatively) in relation to the white middle-class who set the standard. Their racial *identities* are therefore *structuring* their class position in real and significant ways. The concept of cultural style thus renders the qualities of selfhood which “privilege individuals in the micro-politics of everyday life” (Moore, 2004: 451).

Furthermore, insofar as embodied cultural capital expresses the distinctions and divisions of class-, race- or gender-differentiated histories of acquisition, this will be reflected in different *cultural styles*. Thus, our identities and their interactional negotiation provide a key dynamic mechanism of structuration. These themes are illustrated in Hey’s discussion of the relationship between her subjectivity, class mobility, academic identity (group membership) and accent (embodied cultural capital):

I play games through my accent. Whilst I have generally modulated my accent in response to how I experience other people reading me as a “thicko” ... I continue to constitute my accent as something of a tribal trophy. I frequently and deliberately exaggerate its broadness as a reminder that I am not an endemic member of the class that is invisible to itself. Moreover I have to admit to a childish frisson as I undercut the stifling discretions of academic formalities with my Northern vernacular. ... Finding my voice(s) in higher education has meant and continues to mean a constant negotiation with a cultural code that is not natural. (Hey, 1998: 142-3)

As Hey points out, whilst she is able to enact some control over her expressive repertoire (i.e. playing “games” with her accent), this is not complete, and others will fashion a self for her regardless, through which her cultural style is read in terms of its regional class origins. It is these group memberships, based on class, regionality as they are relayed through her cultural style, which has determined the opportunities open to her to form identifications within academia. In turn, the way she has responded and being treated has structured the on-going development of the habitus and her subjectivity. There are thus elements of constraint and agency. The work of Goffman indicates that *identities* are important sites of resistance, struggle, conformity, and structuration plus the articulation of social powers.

Emotions also play a significant part in the realisations of our identities and underpin expressivity. Goffman in particular was interested in the vulnerability of our identities in relation to our emotional investment in situational realities. For Goffman “selves are emotionally vulnerable – easily damaged, betrayed, discreditable, embarrassed” and so on (Best, 2005: x). Negative emotions and moods, as Goffman showed so evocatively, can be highly constraining; conversations and encounters can leave a person feeling drained, dejected, humiliated, shamed (Goffman, 1963/1990). At the same time, social interactions can be experienced as effusive and effervescent events, as pleasurable, and energising: in other words, emotionally transforming. The emotions generated in interaction rituals stratify situations and drive the feelings of solidarity and exclusion that bind and divide individuals. Individuals will tend to gravitate towards people and situations which increase their own stocks of emotional energy and avoid those that do not, that depress and deplete their emotional energy. This in turn has consequences for wider social formation since the identities enacted in rituals express the embodied cultural capital of individuals which index the symbols of local and wider



group memberships. Thus from this perspective, social power has an important interpersonal, emotional and negotiated dimension:

Privilege and power is not simply a result of unequal material and cultural resources. It is a flow of energy across situations that makes some individuals more impressive, more attractive or dominant; the same situational flow puts other people in their shadow, narrowing their sources of ... [emotional energy] to the alternatives as participating as followers or being relegated passively to the side-lines. (Collins, 2004: xii)

As well as producing varying amounts of emotional energy, rituals also have a controlling function for group membership. For those energised by a particular ritual, it reinforces their attachment to the group, often leading them to feel morally virtuous and moved to defend the honour of the group; conversely, amongst those excluded from a group, a sense of guilt or alienation might be prominent. Although we tend to only notice these dramatic instances, virtually all our social interactions have an emotional tonality to them, which underpin our feelings of solidarity and distance with other people, heightening the sense of “reality” of the given situation (Collins, 2004: 102-134). The next section explores how the institutional contexts of interaction rituals shape situated identities and power relations.

### **3.2.2. Institutional identities and power relations**

Goffman's performative account of the self is a useful tool for thinking about institutional identities. Within institutions such as schools, individuals have roles to play (as TAs or teachers) in relation to others (parents, pupils, etc.). Goffman suggested that we may usefully distinguish between interactions that occur in frontstage and backstage regions (Goffman, 1969/1990: 110-16). Frontstage interaction rituals take place in view of an audience (or are potentially accessible to one). Interactions within this region tend to be highly stylised and project an idealised sense of self in an effort to maintain and embody the forms of conduct expected by the audience. As Goffman notes, when “one's activity occurs in the presence of others, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed” (1969/1990: 114). This can result in a heightened awareness and use of impression management, emotional regulation, in response to demands for situational conformity and action – for example, teachers' and TAs' performance in front of pupils in the classroom or teachers interactions with parents.

In contrast, backstage regions require less impression management and emotional regulation. They are settings “where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude” (1969/1990: 116) and where they are able to exert “backstage control”. As Goffman observed:

A back region or backstage maybe defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course. ... Here the team can run through its performances. ... Here the performer can relax, he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character. (1969/1990: 114-5)

Goffman noted that the distinction between front and backstage is relative to a performance of the relevant role and the nature of the audience. Each region enables different kinds of identities and performances that serve different goals and therefore have different consequences. Paying attention to region *differences*, how they are constructed and maintained within an institution, can tell us how power relations and identities are negotiated. For example, whose presence defines a setting as front or backstage tells us a lot of about the distribution of symbolic power to define a situation, and what forms of self-presentation are permissible, and what resources can or cannot be utilised from an individuals’ expressive repertoire. The micro-political perspective within the sociology of education (e.g. Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991, 1997) has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of understanding schools through a focus on what Hoyle (1982: 87) referred to as the “organisational underworld”, namely backstage regions where alternative motivating solidarities, allegiances and alliances come into play.

Collins has extended Goffman’s institutional analysis to focus on the specific structuring influence of authority relations on identity and working lives. Collins contends that *institutionalised* forms of power, namely authority relations, confront individuals with different interpersonal experiences of constraints and opportunities. They are often characterised by differences and asymmetry of status/authority. He refers to such interactions as “power rituals” where the focus is on “the process of giving and taking orders itself” (2004: 112). TAs’ and teachers’ interactions in classrooms would be a good example of this. Collins makes a number of observations about power rituals, and the positions occupied by participants which can usefully be deployed to illuminate occupational relations in schools.

First, what is crucial in such a ritual is the shared focus on expressive acts of authority, showing respect for the order-giving process itself (Collins, 2004: 112). There is, in such situations, a continuum of order-takers and order-givers. On one end of the spectrum may be placed those who take orders from few or none, but give orders to many; then those who must take orders from some people but can also command others; and at the other end of the spectrum those who are order-takers only (1975: 64-89). Collins argues that order-givers tend to take the dramaturgic lead and initiative in such interactions and have more invested in their Goffmanesque frontstage selves and the maintenance of the “proper” modes of conduct and demeanour which are expected of occupants of that position. Their cognitive and subjective orientations are towards the “official” order, which upholds their position, and its symbols (Collins, 1975: 64-86). In contrast, by the nature of their weaker position in an authority relationship, order-takers are required to take part in these power rituals and offer deference. Order-takers have a more ambivalent attitude to the symbols of the dominant order. For them, power rituals can be emotionally alienating offering fewer opportunities for self-expression (Scheff, 2001). The cognitions and emotional energies of order-takers tend therefore towards the cultivation of backstage selves, where less regulated self-expression is possible, and workers may ridicule and criticise their bosses or superiors (Collinson, 1994). This means that order-takers tend to have more of an investment in their backstage personas, or, put differently, they are often less attached to their frontstage selves. Over the course of a working life, Collins suggests that where an individual (or groups) are positioned in relation to their recurrent occupational experiences of authority relations, will lead to the development of certain generalised dispositions and orientations<sup>15</sup>. Thus from a Bourdieusian perspective, situations in which authority is acted out and their associated identities, are an important site of the re-socialisation of the habitus. Collins’s work therefore emphasises the significance of *work* in developing and shaping aspects of the habitus, outside of the more obvious sites of socialisation favoured in Bourdieu’s work of the family and education.

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<sup>15</sup> These broad tendencies in authority relations can, as Collins suggests, be linked to occupational class stratification and position. In his putative scheme, working-class fractions approximate to the order-takers, the upper middle-class as order-givers and the middle-class are in the middle experiencing an occupational life that is a combination of both. Collins is himself drawing upon Dahrendorf’s (1959) seminal work on authority and class conflict.

### **3.3.      *Implications of the theoretical framework for the study***

The key aim of this thesis is to offer a theorised analysis of TAs' working lives in two urban schools, in relation to contextualised aspects of neighbourhood social change and class-education articulations. This requires attention to the basis of class power in material, social, cultural and symbolic relations and their constitution through struggle and conflict, at various levels of the social system – the neighbourhood, institutional, interpersonal and subjective experience.

This chapter has sought to develop and elucidate a critical theoretical framework, drawing from the work of Bourdieu, Goffman and Collins, that will advance this aim. Starting with Bourdieu, I introduced the concepts central to his model of social life: habitus, capitals, field, plus the associated notions of symbolic capital and violence, as they are articulated in his analysis of class formation and power relations. Bourdieu's concepts focus on the tensions and *conflicts* which permeate social life, and how processes of domination and power operate at various levels of society. His concepts also illustrate the importance of the cultural and symbolic dimensions of power relations, and how these are refracted at the level of individual dispositional action through the habitus. Bourdieu's concept of class habitus as a site for the articulation of mental, cultural and social structures advances a compelling view of how social relations are embodied and reproduced. It does so by explicating the linkages (which are specified empirically) between individuals' formative experiences and social conditions – educational, work and neighbourhood experiences, and their present-day actions, practices and perspectives.

The different habitus which TAs bring to the school – in respect of their class-differentiated educational experiences and trajectories, working histories – are likely to have an impact on their formation and institutional perspective and action. It also opens up a space for conceptualising aspects of institutional culture and action within a school as built on differences in the habitus of its members. This will be helpful in examining how TAs' social trajectories and backgrounds inform their institutional perspectives and experiences; and serve to explicate how prior experiences and differences of class and cultural background may be manifested and impact on institutional realities.

The notion of field, in tandem with capitals, offers a way of viewing the interconnections “outside”, in the neighbourhood, and cultural and social formations “inside” the school, as well as the struggles which animate each domain. This framework sensitises us to how groups make claims (territorial in the case of gentrification) and how this informs their social perspective – who they identify with and who they consider as “other” in making these claims.

Turning to Goffman and Collins, the concept of interaction ritual describes how identity and action are constituted from routinized interactions that are invested with symbolic significance. Interaction rituals are the basis for interpersonal bonds through which enactments of social and cultural memberships are expressed. Goffman and Collins’s approach emphasises human agency and individuals’ dynamic capacity to act and express intersecting group memberships. Their approach suggests that social action cannot be fully accounted for by the workings of institutional rules, or wider determinations of Bourdieusian fields and their assimilation into the habitus. Rather, individuals act in terms of their interpersonal realities which they feel emotionally moved to maintain and, rarely, to confront, to change an unfair or oppressive reality. To engage in social interaction requires the acceptance, largely implicit, of a negotiated set of contextualised expectations. These contextualized expectations frame local actions, local behaviour and role, and the local social identities expressed which in turn structure the unfolding social interaction, presenting opportunities and constraints. Goffman shows us in his own work that life often follows routines, and reproduces the status quo unintentionally – and here he is in agreement with Bourdieu – because it is the path of least resistance and constitutive of social and cultural inertia. Arguably Bourdieu reduces this to the level of habitus.

The concept of interaction ritual has heuristic power serving to highlight the conditions under which symbols of group membership arise, and the institutional consequences for solidarity and fragmentation. This will enable a focus on how institutional identification is maintained and generated in light of the changing cultural and social conditions set by gentrification. Goffman offers analytical purchase on how selves are crafted and performatively<sup>16</sup> expressed. These insights, as suggested, can be integrated with Bourdieu’s work, to produce a nuanced account of identity

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<sup>16</sup> This line of thought has been developed by social theorists such as Judith Butler (1990).

construction through the concept of *cultural style*. Cultural style represents the interpersonal resources and repertoires which agents make use of in and through interaction rituals, to maintain a particular definition of the situation and identity. This concept tracks agents' capacities in virtue of their embodied cultural capital to remake their social worlds "not on the global level of a 'society' in the large sense but as memberships that are local, sometimes ephemeral, stratified, and conflictual" (Collins, 2004: xi). Cultural style offers a dynamic sense of how the different memberships (locality, race, ethnicity, occupational group, etc.) and their intersectionality come into play through identity processes.

Goffman's dramaturgic metaphors of back and frontstages capture the dynamic and differentiated character of institutional life. They shift attention to the differences in situational contexts, in terms of audience members, and its consequences for individuals' capacity to act meaningfully and enact their social and cultural identities. Interaction rituals may also differ across a range of dimensions; for example, they may be relatively informal, and occur in backstage regions (staffroom and playground interaction with colleagues or pupils) or highly stylised, task-orientated, regulated interactions in frontstage (e.g. during pedagogic activities); they may be primarily symbolic (assemblies) or a complex mixture as occurs in meetings which maybe front or backstage affairs (Owens and Sutton, 1999; Schwartzman, 1989). Each of these situational contexts presents workers with different opportunities and constraints to act through which they can negotiate their understanding and position with the cultural and social system of an institution.

Power is an important concept for both approaches. Power understood in Bourdieusian terms inheres in "the social location of individuals, and the entitlements associated with their positions in a social field or institution ... [and the capacity] to make decisions, pursue ends or realise interests" (Thompson, 1990: 59). The micro-sociological approach, however, attends to the ways in which class and other forms of socially unequal power relations have to be worked at through the structures of available opportunities to act within interaction rituals. Social power is dynamic and does not simply reflect macro-social positions and the distributions of capitals: interaction rituals instantiate the structuration of powers. As Collins argues, "we need to be open to the possibility that the actual experience of stratification in social

encounters is highly fluctuating, subject to situational contestation” (2000: 19-20)<sup>17</sup>. It is therefore an empirical question of identifying those occasions where situational stratification intersects with social stratification, under what conditions, and how this is done and accomplished for any particular time/place. Further, Collins’s exposition of power rituals expressed as authority relations is sensitive to the complexity of lived experiences within institutions such as schools, where forms of power are explicitly and unequally distributed amongst persons occupying specific roles (pupils, teachers, TAs, etc.). This view of power highlights the opportunities for subversion, resistance, and alternative forms of cognition and action. Moreover, whereas for Bourdieu social control is affected through the internalised cultural control and self-regulation of the habitus, in Goffman’s work, social control is more localised and exerted through the individuals’ need for social acceptance. Social control is not something exacted from above, or even necessarily always through the habitus; “it is a deep, complex, moral arrangement in our everyday encounters, to help each other stage our personal realities” (Williams cited in Hillyard, 2004: 17). From this perspective the social order is relatively open, fluid and more contestable than specified in Bourdieu’s work.

Finally, the emphasis on emotions as underpinning social bonds and identity formation has important implications for this study. It suggests that interactions which focus on transforming emotional codes and feelings bring about transformations in social relations through changes in the character of social bonds, which in turn can impact on identities and forms of solidarities and conflicts operative in a group or institutional context. Research on humour in organisational settings (Griffiths, 1998; Taylor and Bain, 2003; Watts, 2007) and schools (Woods, 1983) shows that successful humour can influence social relations through its content (what is said) – which can function as a resource and form of particularised cultural capital – and its emotionally productive capacity (Emerson, 1969; Holmes and Marra, 2002a; Weeks, 2004).

## **Conclusions**

The theoretical framework and concepts developed in this chapter have the potential to support relatively fine-grained situated ethnographic into TAs’ working lives. It has

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<sup>17</sup> Collins goes further and endorses a form of micro-sociological reductionism, claiming “we can derive almost everything that we want to know about individuals, as a moving precipitate across situations” (2004: 4).

the heuristic power to render and illuminate the relationship between expressive culture – forms of talk and codes of feelings – interaction and social structures. As a form of critical theory, this framework is responsive to Sharp and Green’s caution that: “the sociologist should go beyond the phenomenological preoccupation with human meanings ... to try and develop some sociology of situations, their underlying structure and interconnections and the constraints and contingences they impose” (1975: 25). In the final analysis, the strength of any conceptual framework in the social sciences lies in its capacity to generate “news”, i.e., empirical investigations illuminated by fresh theoretical insights concerning social reality. As Bernstein once remarked, “conceptual elegance is attractive but only when it has the living quality which comes from empirical exploration” (1975b: 4). My articulating of elements of Bourdieu’s work with those of Goffman and Collins will, I argue, usefully advance the empirical topics to which they are applied whilst also being productive of new insights. The next chapter shows how the framework elaborated above is supported by the chosen ethnographic approach of this study, and provides details and discussions of the fieldwork<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> A glossary of the main theoretical concepts developed in this chapter can be found in appendix A.



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## Chapter 4 – Methodological Approach

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The textbooks ... sometimes give one a heroic image of the sociologist-ethnographer as a man or woman with clear eyes and penetrating vision who can, from the first, see ahead and understand what is to be seen, who can plan and act purposefully ... One's own experience tends to be quite different. (Rock, 2001: 33)

This chapter explicates the ethnographic orientation of this study, examining its underlying epistemological assumptions, the motivations and rationale for its use, and show its articulation with the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter. I also explain the biographical and other influences which have shaped the research. Following this, I give brief accounts of: the selection and negotiation of access to Plumtree and Greenvale as sites for fieldwork; the forms of data generation; and the methods and techniques of analysis used. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethics, anonymity, reflexivity and representation.

### **4.1. *Biographical and other influences***

Whether or not it is acknowledged in textual representation, the researcher-self is always present. The production of knowledge stems from a particular vantage point in the world, although it is not reducible to it. There is no objective “view from nowhere”, to use Nagel’s (1986) evocative phrase, on the social universe. We do not overcome the distortions which arise from researching “others”; rather our personal biases, involvements and social location should be made as explicit as is possible (Coffey, 1999).

The methodological rationale and foci of this study are significantly grounded in aspects of my own occupational experiences of working in an assistant role<sup>19</sup> in inner-city London; aspects of my own ethno-cultural and social background – in particular my experiences of educational and social trajectory; and in my changing relationship to the locality in which the schools in this study are situated. These factors can, in retrospect,

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<sup>19</sup> I started as general TA, and then moved into another assistant-type role, as an unqualified teacher responsible for implementing the school’s gifted and talented policy.

be seen to have influenced some of the choices regarding the shape that the research eventually took.

My own education began elsewhere, in urban post-colonial Freetown, Sierra Leone, where I was born and undertook the greater part of my primary schooling. My family emigrated to the UK in 1987, and moved to Croxfield, into social housing, in 1989. I briefly attended a local urban primary school before going on to a local comprehensive secondary school. As “black African” immigrants in Croxfield, my family occupied a similar marginal position to the existing multi-ethnic working-classes in the borough. Croxfield therefore holds deep personal resonances in my own habitus, and I share some aspects of this history with several of the TAs and other informants encountered in the study. Equally, my educational trajectory (and social mobility) – and the privileged forms of knowledge and experience which it embodied – produced a number of tensions and ambivalences, typical of working-class relations to education (Reay, 1996). As Brewer observes:

In British society since the Industrial Revolution, the progress of this social group [the working-class] has been measured in terms of the dissemination of the bourgeois values of individual advancement. Each successive generation of working-class children is seen as being both a threat to and hope for what society might be. Progress for the children has been framed in terms of disjunction and movement from – rather than a continuum or reproduction of – the culture and values of their parents. (2000: 175).

Educational mobility was, initially at least, experienced as “individual advancement”, and as an “escape” from Croxfield and the marginalised social position I occupied. As Walkerdine *et al.* (2001) found in their psycho-social explorations of the psychic landscape of class, housing tenure and locality are interwoven. One of their research participants, Satinder, a British-born Asian woman, narrates her experiences of social mobility thus:

Satinder: I think when we were in Croxfield we were working class ... I don't know where the line lies.

JM: Well what changed for you to start seeing yourself as a middle class?

Satinder: I suppose having a bigger house. Yeah, it was probably that.

(Quoted in Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001: 34)

Unlike Satinder, my family did not move away from Croxfield, but my educational career did take me out of the locality through university study. Walkerdine *et al.* suggest that:

for families like Satinder's (as well as for many of the white working-class families) moving out of the inner-city and into the suburbs was one way of attempting to escape the stigmatising effects of the "urban imagery", which threatened to fix them as part of the "underclass". (2001: 35)

Unsettled by my educational "success" (a first-class degree in Philosophy followed by a scholarship for postgraduate study), I returned home to Croxfield, where I took up employment as an assistant within a primary school. My sense of ambivalence and confusion, as I later discovered, is a common sentiment amongst working-class academics; more so amongst those from black backgrounds (Reynolds, 1996). Although it was only intended to be temporary work, I soon became aware of the complexity and difficulties of the role, as well as my own unpreparedness for it. I observed from a personal perspective some of the tensions between TAs and teachers – as well those between adults and pupils, and families and teachers – and the differing understandings among TAs of their role.

My curiosity about this social world upon which I had stumbled, and its seeming invisibility to the wider world, proved irresistible. I conducted an initial small-scale study in 2002 for a Masters' dissertation in Research Methods (Mansaray, 2003). There I explored the roles, perceptions and practices of TAs in the school of my employment, referred to as "Fenton", and another school in Croxfield where I had contacts but which was largely unknown to me, referred to as "Middleton". This constituted a *de facto* pilot study and comprised nine interviews (seven TA interviews and an interview with the deputy head in each school), a few completed work diaries, and my own reflections and observations of colleagues at Fenton. Although very limited in scope, this research pointed to differences in assistants' perspectives and experiences of work, which were influenced not only by the particular kinds of pupils with whom they worked (which in itself was interesting), but also by variations in their trajectories and backgrounds, and in the schools themselves. I wanted to explore further what was at the root of the differences in TAs' institutional lives, how TAs dealt with the challenges of working in inner-city schools, and what were the shared and contingent aspects of their work experiences.

Also, on a personal level, I was increasingly becoming aware of the white middle-class presence within Croxfield, and new social realities which were now visible to me by virtue of my own changing social location and relationship to the area.<sup>20</sup> In a sense, therefore, the present study was motivated by a desire to understand the character of inner-city schools, the work of TAs' within them, and how this is experienced amidst contemporary social changes. I also wanted to investigate the way different groups, working together, with divergent interests, values and backgrounds, negotiate and define educational work within an unequal society. In the next section, I outline the rationale for the ethnographically-inspired approach taken in this study, its epistemological underpinnings and relation to the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2.

#### **4.2. Critical ethnographic orientation**

The approach taken within this thesis is a broadly critical ethnographically-inspired case study. It is critical in the sense developed in chapter 2, in seeking to illuminate the operations, both covert and overt, of power; and ethnographic in the sense of an emphasis on meaning and action in specific local observed contexts within two case study schools.

An ethnographic orientation is sometimes defined solely in relation to case study fieldwork practice, largely in-situ participant observation.

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in the people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1)

Ethnography has an important temporal dimension as indicated by the definition above, and often requires a protracted engagement in the field. This allows the researcher to grasp patterns of behaviour and to gauge their typicality. As Woods notes, "some forms of behaviour may be fairly stable, others variable, others emergent. Some forms of interaction proceed in stages or phases" (cited in Jeffrey and Troman, 2004: 537). This cautions against an overemphasis on the novel and idiosyncratic. Further,

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<sup>20</sup> By the time of the start of the present study, I no longer resided in Croxfield, although my family continues to live there.

prolonged fieldwork provides opportunities to observe how people cope with different situations and compare what people *say* with what they *do*. This enables a context to be explored through a fuller range of the perspectives within it. Although ethnographers emphasise participant observation, fieldwork is eclectic, and uses a variety of other ways of generating data, including statistical analysis and interviews.

As well as considerations of *process*, how ethnography is done, there are those who view ethnography in terms of what is *produced*, the analytical and theoretical presentation of the results of fieldwork (Wolcott, 1989, 1999). From this perspective, ethnography is more than fieldwork methods. Both accounts however share, broadly, many of the same epistemological assumptions as the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2; in particular, a concern with social interaction as a locus of agency and meaning in the social world. This is due in part to the influence of symbolic interactionism in the development of ethnographic theory and practice (Fine, 1993; Rock, 2001). For interactionists, the social world consists of human beings who act towards things insofar as they have meaning for them. Meaning arises out of the social interactions between individuals and their use of language and other symbols. These are then modified through an interpretative and negotiated process as individuals encounter each other and objects (Spradley, 1980: 8-9). If, such a picture of the social realm is cogent, then it follows that the social order is amenable to *observation*. That is, *knowledge* is possible through an engagement or immersion within the symbolic, linguistic and interactional practices of individuals revealing the subjective sense given to specific situations (Winch, 1990). This concern with meaning has led to ethnographers' focus on what others do (action), say (language) and use (artefacts) in their daily lives (Spradley, 1980). As Wolcott adds: "The ethnographer attempts to make *explicit* and portray in terms of social interaction ... what ... various members [of a group] know only *tacitly* and understand *individually*" (1989: 41-2). Ethnography therefore places a high value on the *emic* (the insider's use of concepts and perspectives). There is however a tension between the *emic* and the observer's own theoretical frameworks and orientation towards external audiences (the *etic*). From the critical perspective developed in this study, the emphasis is resolved in favour of theory. This is the role of *critical theory*, as interpretation and illumination of empirical realities. From this perspective what is *real* includes and goes beyond what is necessarily encompassed in agents' awareness and concepts. As Jermier notes:

the critical theorist's agenda is not identical to that of a conventional ethnographer. ... [In] addition to portraying their informants' world view, critical theorists also aim to reveal socioeconomic conditions that produce and reinforce asymmetrical structures of control. (1998: 240)

In other words, the constraints, limitations and enablers which shape interactions and individuals' capacity to act, and create meaning, are not always open to observation or directly accessible to those individuals. From a critical ethnographic orientation "*reality* refers to more than what is constructed as *knowledge* by members of a cultural group" (Carspecken and Georgiou, 2002: 689). Having outlined the critical ethnographic orientation of this study, in the next section I focus on practical issues of sampling and access.

#### **4.3. Selection, recruitment, access and entrance into the field**

The criteria for the selection of the fieldwork schools were flexible and open. The overriding concern was to have schools with sufficient variation to allow an array of contrasts to emerge. Whilst more demanding of time and resources, using multiple research sites can, as Fine (2003) suggests, provide a greater measure of confidence that the findings are not unique and idiosyncratic. I wanted schools that were comparable, with similar levels of pupil attainment, a diverse social class and ethnic pupil intake; ideally, schools which considered themselves "successful" on their own terms. Proxy measures such as the proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), proportions speaking English as an Additional Language (EAL), and Ofsted reports were used. It was assumed, based on the pilot study, that the social class and ethnic diversity of the TAs would be indicative of those of the pupils. Overall, the sampling strategy and criteria were purposive.

The recruitment, selection and organisation of access into the two case study schools were somewhat difficult and serendipitous, as is often the case with ethnographic-type work. I sent recruitment letters<sup>21</sup> to several schools in a number of inner-city London boroughs without much response. Some of these schools were in Croydon. I was originally reluctant to target schools there, having conducted the pilot research in Croydon and because of my own personal connections to the area. In retrospect, this

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<sup>21</sup> See appendix G.

was naivety on my part, given the number – over one hundred – of primary schools in Croxfield. I was perhaps seduced by the idea of ethnographic fieldwork as involving a personal or epistemic break with the familiar which required some kind of distance; that it had to be *somewhere else* (Wolcott, 1999).

Pragmatism and a lack of success in making contact with schools elsewhere led me to focus on Croxfield, and use of personal contacts to gain access to schools. Some of this was luck. A casual meeting with an old acquaintance, Cornell<sup>22</sup>, the acting Head of Ethnic Minority Achievement in the local authority, led to my attendance (on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2003) at a professional development course for TAs in the borough on raising the achievement of black and Turkish pupils. The session was an excellent and impromptu introduction to the art of participant observation. I also attended the following session (on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2003)<sup>23</sup>, during which I conducted an exploratory focus group interview with the seven attendees. I obtained the school contact details of participants and, in a few cases, their personal contact details. I established email contact with one TA, Ellie, and she indicated that the head of the school, Plumtree, would be amenable to the idea of my research project. I made contact, again via email, with the head, Tom, and arranged a meeting for 8<sup>th</sup> March 2004. Notes from that first day describe my initial reactions:

The school was located between tall and well-kept houses of Oakland Avenue. I have never noticed it before. It was a small school not of the usual imposing Victorian type that abound in Croxfield. I was greeted by the secretary, a black lady, who led me to the Head ... I was nervous and disoriented. We had a brief chat, I explained to him my aims and the extent of the study, and that it might involve a prolonged engagement with the school. I was vague on how long it might take but he did not seem troubled about this, and I showed him my Criminal Records Bureau certificate ... He asked what I wanted to do that day. I was surprised; I hadn't expected this to be any more than a "meeting" about access. He suggested that I "shadow" Ellie for the morning. I wasn't sure whether this was a good thing. I was a bit worried about positioning myself, on my first day, so closely to one person. I would be somewhat limited in what I could see/hear/do or where in the school I could venture. My romantic image of the intrepid wandering ethnographer was shattered somewhat. However, Ellie turned out to be a superb informant, a self-conscious and articulate "native". She treated me as an "honoured guest" and provided a running commentary to everything she did with very little prompting; she told me who

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<sup>22</sup> Cornell (a pseudonym) was a science teacher in the secondary school I attended in Croxfield.

<sup>23</sup> Informants' details from this focus group can be found in appendix B.

people were, what they did, and explained plenty about the school day and when activities took place. It was a sensory and verbal overload. She often introduced me as follows: "This is Ayo; he's doing a research project on TAs, everything they do, or what they don't do". I met a few teachers, but mainly I was introduced to TAs. Teachers seemed largely indifferent to my presence or research.

(FN8-03-04)

Thus ended the first day of what was to become an 18-month fieldwork engagement with Plumtree. The fieldnotes also indicate that from the beginning I was embroiled in the complex negotiation of my role and the constant sampling decisions which are an inextricable part of ethnography – what to see, where to go, whom to talk to, which relationships to cultivate (Coffey, 1999). They also point to the embryonic development of my relationship with Ellie, who was to prove a key informant during the fieldwork.

I was pleasantly surprised at the relative ease with which I had negotiated access to Plumtree. Recruiting a second school, however, proved more difficult, and my fieldwork was in danger of becoming a *single* ethnographic case study which, in light of the research aims, would have been disappointing. Over the following months, fieldwork continued at Plumtree, and I sent letters and used contacts, to no avail. Once again, a chance meeting with Cornell led to attendance at a conference for senior school leaders in Croxfield. This took place on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2004, and I made several contacts with teachers in Croxfield schools. I arranged two school visits; one to a primary school a few minutes' walk from Plumtree, and the other to Greenvale. At the former, Creswell Primary, I met the head, who expressed some reservations, especially about the length of time I would be in the school. My Greenvale contact, Heidi, arranged a visit to the school on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2004, to meet the deputy head. I primarily visited Heidi's class, and spoke to the TAs I encountered there. I managed a quick chat with the deputy head, Owen, about what the research would entail. He seemed agreeable but wanted to check with the head, Bev. I was told to return in the new term in September. The situation was left somewhat ambiguously, with a verbal agreement pending confirmation from the head. Also, Heidi would be leaving at the end of the summer term; with no contact within the school my connection felt very tenuous.



I returned on the first day of term (2<sup>nd</sup> September), having had no interim communications with the school personnel. Unknown to me, it was a training day. Moreover, they were not aware of my emails, nor had Owen spoken to the head about the research. He had largely, it seemed, forgotten our previous conversation, and seemed surprised to see me. I was told to come back the following day. The fieldnotes highlight my sense of desperation and strain.

Leaving the school I was disappointed and despondent, and felt somewhat rejected by Owen's and the school's indifferent attitude towards the research. I would prefer that they say no rather than stringing me along. So I can move on. I really got the feeling that the head, who I haven't met yet, might refuse. Being in the staffroom with all the members of staff, I felt like I was intruding and since no one knew me, really conspicuous, in contrast to my reception at Plumtree where I was by now a "familiar stranger".

(FN4-09-04)

Arriving at Greenvale the next day, I felt that it would either be the first or last day of fieldwork at the school. I was hastily introduced to the head, during the teachers' morning meeting. I was allocated a teacher (Dave) and spent my first day in his classroom, with very circumscribed access to other staff. Although a teacher rather than a TA, Dave was to prove a key informant. In contrast to my initial meeting with Tom at Plumtree, my meeting with Bev on that first day was indicative of what transpired to be a difficult relationship. Her manner was brisk, forceful and candid. Unlike Tom, she interrogated my rationale for the project. I felt very much that she had power over me. She told me she was "suspicious" of me, and that for all she knew I could be an undercover Ofsted "plant". Sensing resistance, and wanting to avoid unnecessary confrontation on the first day of fieldwork, I emphasised that my presence would be unobtrusive. Given the open-ended nature of ethnographic work, my inexperience and the vagueness of my ideas on what the fieldwork would entail, I found it difficult to give firm answers. This, in a truncated form, is how I came to settle on the schools for this study.

From the description above, it is apparent that my role was constructed and experienced very differently at each of the schools. At Greenvale, I held a precarious, uncertain position, and the head made concerted efforts to control and manage my access to TAs, teachers and various settings. In Plumtree, by contrast, I was a recognisable presence in the school. I had very little direct communication or

interaction with Tom, the head, and I was relatively unhindered in the field. What seemed, initially, to be idiosyncratic differences of “personality” between Tom and Bev, became more culturally embedded as I was socialised into both schools and grasped the substantive enactments of headship and cultural style that I was experiencing<sup>24</sup>. Gaining access to the two schools, therefore, was only the beginning of a much longer process of negotiation with key institutional actors, and of attendant imbrications in the political life of both schools.

Although Plumtree and Greenvale will be introduced in greater detail in relation to their neighbourhood contexts in following chapter, it is worth providing a brief contextualisation of them as schools. Their characteristics are summarised along a number of key indicators below.

*Table 1: Key statistical indicators in the fieldwork schools 2004/2005*

		Greenvale	Plumtree
Pupil Roll		620	222
		%	%
Proportion on SEN register		30	3
Proportion with SEN statements		11	4
Proportion eligible for Free School Meals <sup>25</sup>		34	22
Proportion attaining level 4+ <sup>26</sup> :	Maths	78	80
	English	75	90
	Science	87	93
Pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) <sup>27</sup>		36	16
Ethnicity	White British <sup>28</sup>	37	57
	Black	35	11
	Asian	5	7
	Turkish/Kurdish	10	7
	Mixed – White & Black	6	6
	Mixed- White & Asian	1	5
	Mixed-other	1	3
	Other	6	4
Most recent Ofsted grade		Good	Good

<sup>24</sup> The issue of leadership is an important one for this study, and addressed more fully in chapter 6.

<sup>25</sup> The Croxfield average was 48 per cent.

<sup>26</sup> These were a key government performance indicator and a level which pupils were expected to reach by the end of primary schooling.

<sup>27</sup> The Croxfield average was 53 per cent.

<sup>28</sup> The ethnic categories used are simplified in the following way: white British includes, Welsh, English, Irish, other; Black includes, African, Caribbean and other; Asian includes, Bengali, Indian, Pakistani and other.

As the table above indicates, Plumtree and Greenvale differed at the time of fieldwork in a number of ways, including ethnic profile, size, proportion of children with SEN and those having EAL. However, they were both popular and were recognised by Ofsted in their most up-to-date reports at the time as “Good” schools.

There were 28 teachers and 40 TAs employed in 2004 at Greenvale. The school had experienced a period of organisational continuity in the previous three to four years, with no substantive loss of staff. It was led by Bev, who had been head for 15 years. Staff tenure was mixed and contained the full range; with a number who had been at the school for over 20 years and those just beginning their teaching or TA career, and plenty in-between. The school ran both breakfast and after-school clubs, largely staffed by TAs. Several of the teachers, and most of the TAs, lived locally in Earlsdale or the wider borough, including Bev. Greenvale was commended by Ofsted, and was described as “a very effective school where all pupils are valued and achieve appropriately in relation to their prior attainment and abilities” (Ofsted, 2001: 7). The Ofsted report also commented that Bev “provides excellent, strong leadership and staff share her commitment and sense of purpose, working hard to raise standards for all pupils” (2001: 7).

In the past four years, Plumtree, by contrast, had undergone some organisational change. The previous longstanding head Meredith had left in 2001. Subsequently the school was led, briefly, under temporary headships, including for a period by Peter, the current deputy, until the appointment of Tom in late 2002. There had been some turnover amongst the teaching staff in the transitional period between Meredith leaving and Tom’s headship. There were 13 teachers and 17 TAs employed at Plumtree. The tenure of teachers was somewhat polarised, with several relatively new teachers – of less than five years – and a number of very longstanding teachers. Tom, the head, was inexperienced (this was his first headship) and had been in post just under two years at the start of the fieldwork. Ofsted commented on the “effective leadership” and the way in which “all adults work towards ... common goals” (2003b: 6). The next section briefly summarises the main methods of data generation and the type of data produced.

#### **4.4. Data generation**

The data generation started with a focus group of TAs in November 2003 and ended with the conclusion of fieldwork in the two schools in September 2005. Whilst this is presented in a linear manner, analysis develops in tandem with the fieldwork, which in turn structures the focus and relevance of data generated.

##### **4.4.1. Interviewing**

Interviews are co-constructions between the interviewee and interviewer (Cassell, 2005). They are interaction rituals, through which identities are enacted, affirmed or rejected. Consequently, they vary in their formality, emotional tonality and the sense of interpersonal reality created. I interviewed staff within their respective school, in formal “work” spaces where I had relative control of the settings (e.g. a room screened off visually and aurally from intrusion). In contrast, interviews with parents were less strongly framed. They were sometimes conducted in informants’ homes, in the presence of their children, while they undertook other activities (e.g. cooking, ironing) and thus bore similarity to other more informal rituals. Whilst pivotal to data generation, formal interviewing was only part of a wider set of questioning activities embedded in the fieldwork (Walford, 2007).

I interviewed 54 members of staff (TAs and teachers) at Greenvale and Plumtree using semi-structured interview schedules<sup>29</sup>. A general interview schedule was devised for each type of informant: TA, teacher and parent. Indicative topics on the guides included: questions about informants’ role, experiences and perceptions of TAs, perceptions of the neighbourhood, informant’s own educational experiences, working history, perceptions of leadership at the school. These schedules were used flexibly and, as the fieldwork developed reflected my growing knowledge of staff and parents’ on-going concerns. Socio-demographic data was collected from most interviewees using a short questionnaire (see §3.4.4). A few key informants, mainly TAs, were interviewed twice and the total number of recorded staff interviews was 58. The exact distribution across the two schools is shown in the table below.

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<sup>29</sup> For all interview schedules used in the study see appendix E.

Table 2: School staff interviews

	<b>TAs employed</b>	<b>TAs interviewed/as a proportion of staff category</b>	<b>Teachers employed</b>	<b>Teachers interviewed/ as a proportion of staff category</b>
Greenvale	40	14 (35%)	28	12 (43%)
Plumtree	17	16 (94%)	13	11 (85%)

As the table highlights, at Plumtree I interviewed all the employed TAs<sup>30</sup> and most of the teachers. The sampling of interviewees was therefore highly *representative* of the school overall and not very selective. In contrast, Greenvale was a bigger school with a larger staff and this called for judicious sampling decisions. Where possible I interviewed staff that I had observed at work, plus those encountered on a regular basis in the playground or the staffroom. There were a number of factors which limited the number of staff that I interviewed. Firstly, competing demands on my time meant that in conducting an interview I was choosing to forego opportunities for observation. A second important factor was the head, Bev, who obstructed and delayed my interviewing of staff, so that I had a much smaller time window in which to conduct the interviews.

I also interviewed parents from each school to provide further contextualisation of the school's position and reputation in the wider neighbourhood; to probe their social networks; discuss their interactions with the school and the opportunities to participate in the life of the school; and explore general experiences of living in the neighbourhood. The sampling of parents was largely opportunistic. I soon found that it was relatively easy to recruit highly-involved and networked white middle-class parents in both schools, and less so black and minority ethnic parents. My own struggles to achieve a diverse sample of parents in both schools made inequalities in the distribution of power in the structure of the parental field more apparent. Details of the parent interviews are given in the table below

Table 3: Parent interviews

<b>Greenvale</b>	<b>Plumtree</b>
1 focus group – 6 Turkish speaking mothers <sup>31</sup> 5 individual interviews	15 individual interviews

<sup>30</sup> There were a few TAs during the fieldwork who were temporary staff from employment agencies. I do not include them in any of these figures.

<sup>31</sup> This was conducted by myself and a Turkish speaking TA (Bahar) in the school. The interview was then transcribed and translated by a bilingual Turkish speaker. I do not draw much from this data, mainly due to the fact that since I did not interview Turkish-speaking parents at Plumtree, the opportunities for comparative analysis were limited.

Three additional interviews were conducted<sup>32</sup> with the following individuals to provide further contextualisation of the neighbourhood and educational fields:

- Kurdish community worker in Northwick;
- Acting head of ethnic minority achievement at Croxfield local authority;
- Head of inclusion at Croxfield local authority.

With two notable exceptions, one in which the informant requested that the interview not be recorded and another where the recorder failed, all interviews were digitally recorded on Sony Mini-discs and then transferred to compressed digital files. A decision was made to fully transcribe only some of the interviews (24 in total)<sup>33</sup>. This was done from considerations of time and resources, and in relation to emerging themes during fieldwork. I transcribed the interviews of those considered to be key informants in each school; for example, TAs that I spent a lot of time shadowing and who would often provide updates on occurrences during my absence; important institutional figures such as the head of each school; the teachers and TAs in the classrooms where I conducted regular observations; individuals that others considered powerful such as the chair of governors, parent governors; the few male TAs because I wanted to probe whether there were differences of gender in their perspectives and experiences. At times, the decision to transcribe an interview was made by accretion; what began as note-taking sometimes led to full transcription once I began to listen. I was careful to ensure that the transcribed data fully encompassed the diversity of perspectives within each school; so for example, I made enormous efforts to transcribe and translate my focus group interview with working-class Turkish-speaking parents. In contrast, I had several interviews with white middle-class parents in each school, so I did not feel the need to fully transcribe them all. My transcription decisions were also informed by the need to have transcripts that facilitated comparative analysis across themes. The remaining interviews were carefully analysed through repeated listening, note-taking and partial transcription.

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<sup>32</sup> Also an additional *ad hoc* focus group with four pupils from Greenvale was conducted. However, since pupils' perspectives are not the focus of this study, this was not analysed in-depth.

<sup>33</sup> See appendix B for full socio-demographic information on these and all other informants.

#### **4.4.2. Ethnographic observation and notes**

Much of an ethnographer's time is spent "hanging around" with the members of the institution or group that they are studying: listening, observing and noting down what others are saying and doing, whilst trying not be too demanding or obstructive. Participant observation tended to vary in light of the demands of formal interviewing. Insofar as it was feasible, I tended to veer towards being an observer rather than a participant, but this was frequently situationally determined. On various occasions I provided assistance to pupils, TAs and teachers, in formal and informal settings.

I tried to spend roughly one day per week at each school. In total this amounted to approximately 135 fieldwork days. I carried a notebook during most of the fieldwork. It became part of my own presentation of self as a "student-researcher" and signalled my ambiguous status within each of the institutions. At times, it was an object of contention, particularly at Greenvale, where Bev, the head, perceived my note-taking and what it symbolised – my allegiances as an "outsider" – as a potential threat. It remained a live issue for most of my fieldwork at Greenvale and inflected my interactions with Bev. The ambiguity of the situation is illustrated in the short extract below. For context: I was visiting the school to see a TA near the end of the school day, when I encountered Bev, who was clearly surprised to see me so late in the day.

Bev: So, why are you here?

Ayo: I came to see Yolanda and then I saw it was the open evening so I decided to stay. I came to the last one: they are good. It's busy.

Bev: No, you came to spy on us, listen to our conversations, and write it all in your little notebook and generally spook people out.

Ayo: I haven't been writing any notes [defensively].

Bev: [She smiles, signalling that perhaps this is not be taken too seriously]

(FN30-06-05)

At both schools, I was based in the year six classrooms, although I ensured that I observed TAs at work in every year group. The rationale for having year six as a "base" was due in part, in Greenvale, to my initial introduction and subsequent rapport with Dave the class teacher. At Plumtree, it arose from relationships that I had formed with TAs in a year five class in the spring of 2004; since the majority of them were continuing with the same class into year six, I decided to follow. Once established

within these classrooms, I became more interested in other, less structured settings such as the staffroom, dinner halls, playgrounds, ICT suites, etc. My foci within settings centred on Goffmanesque concerns about presentation of self, as expressed through interactions, talk, movement, deportment and gestures between TAs and others. I was also interested in the settings themselves as spaces: the way they were “staged”; the distribution of material objects, furnishings, the meanings people gave to them, and where people placed themselves physically in space; and the temporal sequencing of activities. Observations were not structured – although approximate time and settings (e.g. staffroom, classroom etc.) were always noted – and were largely guided by events as they unfolded within a particular setting. Within classrooms, I focused on assistants’ activities, interaction and talk with pupils and teachers. Conversations between myself and others in a setting also formed a significant part of my practices: asking people what they were doing, and why, often directed my foci within a setting. In other settings, like the staffroom, observations centred on general interaction amongst whoever was present. Notes were written – in an often highly-abbreviated fashion – generally as events occurred, or soon after. They were then written-up within days into a word-processed file. During this process, they were often reworked, expanded and reflected on, and re-interpreted in the transcription from notebook to computerised text (e.g. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). This produced over 90,000 words of textual data.

#### **4.4.3. Geo-demographic analysis**

I used geo-demographic analysis, alongside socio-economic census data, to characterise socio-the economic class structures of Northwick and Earlsdale as localities. This was done using ACORN, a commercially available tool<sup>34</sup> which uses market research consumer information and demographic statistics to create postcode-based typologies to characterise consumption and lifestyle patterns. The ACORN classification for each neighbourhood was obtained by inputting a series of postcodes, including those of each school, adjacent streets, and those used by previous researchers. This process resulted in several neighbourhood typologies which were then re-interpreted in light of other qualitative data and analysis. Similar typologies have been used in the work of several urban geographers to “map the urban middle-classes”, their orientations, values and

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<sup>34</sup> For more details, see the company website at [www.caci.co.uk](http://www.caci.co.uk).



lifestyle (e.g. Butler *et al.*, 2007; 2003a: 49-77; Webber, 2004, 2007). It is a form of analysis which is increasingly being used by researchers examining social class change and identity: advocates such as Savage and Burrows effuse that: “it turns out that knowledge of the spatial location of someone is increasingly an important proxy for all manner of sociological information” (2007: 892). This aspect of the analytical process was thus very important in the development of a conceptualisation of structural relations within Northwick and Earlsdale.

#### **4.4.4. Questionnaires**

Short closed-item questionnaires were constructed to obtain socio-demographic data from TAs, teachers and parents. It enabled qualitative data about informants’ class location to be linked with basic information on household income, housing tenure, highest educational level, the employment status of their partner (where applicable), parental status and so on. Again, this information was also useful in plotting informants’ position within the emergent social space suggested by geo-demographic analysis and other data<sup>35</sup>.

#### **4.4.5. Documentary data**

A range of documentary data from each school was collected, including: policies on behaviour, curriculum, ethnic minority achievement etc.; minutes of meetings, collected newsletters; attainment data, pupil information, trip letters, prospectuses, and *ad hoc* samples of pupils work. This activity again developed in relation to the emerging themes of the fieldwork. Some of these documents were scanned and converted into word-processed files. Some were imported into NVivo – a commercially available Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Software (CAQDAS) – for further analysis and integration with other data sources.

#### **4.4.6. General observations of Northwick and Earlsdale**

Some general observations were made of the neighbourhood spaces both during and outside of school hours. I focused particularly on the built environment and social interactions in public spaces in Northwick and in Earlsdale. I toured the immediate

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<sup>35</sup> Questionnaires used in the study can be found in appendix F.

streets, shops, park and other spaces in the vicinity of the schools on numerous occasions, again with an emphasis on the ways in which people navigated public interactions with each other. These observations were recorded in my fieldnotes.

#### **4.4.7. Policy analysis**

I identified and analysed a number of key government and union-related policy documents concerned with TAs and their work. This was done in order to contextualise the wider socio-political constructions of TAs' work in relation to the remodelling agenda. As I mentioned in the introduction, the remodelling agenda and the policy activity around its implementation was an aspect of the empirical context of TAs' roles at the time of the fieldwork. These documents included the following:

- Coopers and Lybrand. (1998). Reducing the Bureaucratic Burden on Head Teachers.
- DfES. (2002). *Time for Standards: Reforming the School Workforce*
- Morris, E. (2001). *Professionalism and Trust: The Future of Teachers and Teaching*.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2001). *Teacher Workload: A Study*

These documents were analysed thematically, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which TAs and their work were constructed, and demarcated from teachers' roles and responsibilities.

#### **4.4.8. Media documents**

I found that, once sensitised, I was able to find newspaper articles in both national and local newspapers about Croxfield, often about some aspect of gentrification. These media representations were dominant accounts, often by gentrifiers, of Croxfield and its residents. This media data was integrated with other sources for analysis and interrogated. Common themes and narratives were identified; for example, the common practice of reporting crime stories using the broader place-name Croxfield, while "good news" story about house price increases or middle-class lifestyles used the narrower neighbourhood place-names (e.g. Earlsdale, Northwick, etc.).

#### 4.4.9. Terminology and transcription conventions

The empirical data presented in this study is of differing types, and generated in a number of different contexts, using a variety of methods. All data extracts presented in the thesis are given references. These are normally indicated by enclosed brackets which contain some, if not all, of the following information: pseudonym; role; the school to which that individual “belongs”; type of data (of which there are the following types: interviews (IT), fieldnotes (FN), focus group interviews [FG]); where the observations or in-situ data come from, if relevant (e.g. staffroom, support staff meeting, teacher meetings, etc.); and the date on which the data was generated. An example would be: (Yvette, Plumtree-Teacher: IT23-06-04). This denotes Yvette, a teacher at Plumtree, and it is an extract from an interview which took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2004. When an extract is used within the main body of the text, depending on the lead-in description, a reduced reference will be used instead. This and other transcription conventions are summarised in the table below.

Table 4: Transcription and citation conventions

Italicised text	= Denotes emphasised speech in data extracts, or emphasis in original quoted text.
...	= Omitted material.
[Square brackets]	= Inserted material. = Additional information such as non-verbal/para-linguistic cues/gestures/actions – sighs, laughter, anger, tone etc. = may also indicate my interjections/responses within quoted interview extracts.
FN	= Fieldnotes from participant observations.
IT	= Interview transcript.
IN	= Interview notes where transcripts are not available.
FG	= Focus group transcript.

#### 4.5. Analysis

As I indicated in the introduction, some of the themes such as gentrification were not an initial focus, and only became so later on as an emergent aspect of fieldwork experiences, reading of the literature and subsequent analysis. I did not however enter the field *tabula rasa*. The focus of the fieldwork was informed by the pilot study and subsequent re-analysis of that data, published as Mansaray (2006). Further, a general orientation towards ethnography generates questions such as how “order” is produced, what forms of “common-sense” individuals are making use of to generate

particular understandings and definitions of the situation, etc. Fox elucidates this idea when she writes that ethnographic fieldwork is:

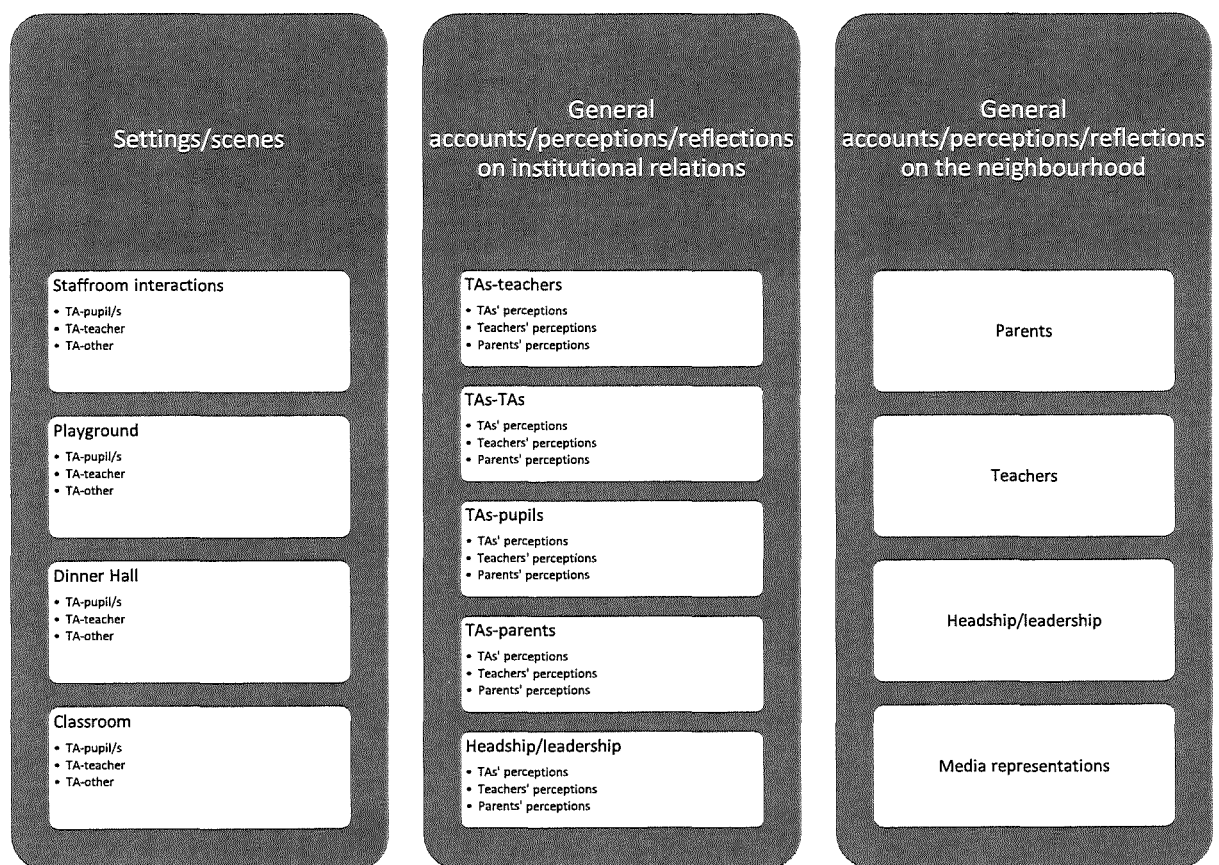
[a] complex, two-way process ... which is both inductive and deductive and through which pertinent sociological concepts, ideas, and information are carried into the field and are activated both by the observational, interview, and documentary data being gathered and by the process of sociological reasoning in which one is trained. (2004: 311)

To facilitate analysis, I drew inspiration from several sources to uncover further layers of meanings within the dataset, which in part led to the development of my own synthesised theoretical approach as outlined in the previous chapter. From critical discourse analysis (Edley, 2001; Taylor, 2001) I gained an appreciation of the linguistic and para-linguistic features of talk and texts and how to trace the imbrications of language in social practices. Equally, I learnt much from reading classic textbooks on how to compose ethnographic notes, such as; Emerson *et al.*'s (1995) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* and Van Maanen's (1988) *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. I also found the reading of "classic" ethnographies from different disciplines useful for their theoretical approach and in some cases substantive focus. For example, studies of ethnic identities and social relations in US and UK inner-cities (e.g. Alexander, 1996; Anderson, 1990; Anderson, 1999; Back, 1996); students' social worlds and identities in schools (e.g. Connolly, 1998; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2000; Pollard, 1985); and work and identity in a multi-national company (Casey, 1995). I do not argue that the overall process was the application of a technique or "method", rather it was a creative process, in which the interplay between inductive themes, imaginative leaps, abductive inference and conceptual development, led to analytical illumination and formative insights. Weick describes the *abductive* process as: "clues [giving] rise to speculations, conjectures, and assessments of plausibility rather than to a search among known rules to see which one might best fit the facts" (2005: 433).

In practical terms, of "how" the analysis was conducted, my thematic coding strategy (illustrated below) was informed by my initial readings of Goffman's ethnographic work (1963/1990) which emphasised social and spatial settings as key frames for interaction rituals. For each school and locality, the qualitative data were organised to facilitate comparative analysis, in the following manner: first, a focus on settings/scenes – observed interactions and experiences/accounts and perspectives of interactions within

key spaces/settings (e.g. classroom, staffroom etc.); a second aspect, focusing on informants' perceptions and experiences of various social relationships, usually dyadic (e.g. TA-head, TA-teacher etc.); and finally, perceptions, accounts and experiences of the neighbourhood from the perspectives of parents, TAs, teachers, senior leadership and media. Additional analysis was conducted using census, ACORN<sup>36</sup>, local authority data, as well as the secondary literature, to develop the characterisation of gentrification within the two localities. Although informed by the overall analysis, a slightly more holistic approach was used in relation to TAs' biographical formation and trajectories; these were reconstructed predominantly from interview data, and focused comparative reading of whole transcripts. The overall analytical strategy is represented in diagrammatic form below.

Figure A: Analytical and coding strategy



Most of the textual data – including transcribed interviews, ethnographic notes, scanned documents, newspaper articles – were imported into NVivo. Using NVivo

<sup>36</sup> The ACORN typologies used in analysis are reproduced in appendix D.

enabled the integrated analysis of the majority of the textual data generated, which made it easier to code, write memos, search and retrieve data, but also ensured the data remained linked as the coding became more refined and the data was reduced and abstracted (Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson, 1996). Statistical information was analysed separately and assimilated into the wider analysis in the writing process. Managing and cataloguing the literature was aided by Endnote, a bibliography and citation software.

Qualitative analysis of transcripts, ethnographic notes and other data was at times mundane, frustrating, and involved copious amounts of reading and re-reading of transcripts, and re-coding and drafting. The analysis process was iterative and developed with reference to the literature. In addition, there was *constant comparison* (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) between schools, neighbourhoods, informants, and groups, as well as within them. Eventually, these processes of analysis and interactive reflection yielded an account articulated through a theoretical language whose vocabulary is founded on the critical theories of Bourdieu, Goffman and Collins. This framework in turn led to further re-analysis of the data and elaboration and drafting of the final arguments in relation to the academic literature and the substantive themes identified.

#### **4.6. Ethics and reflexivity**

Ethics is part of the general reflexivity of the research process, which involves constantly “thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognising the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (Mason, 2002, p. 5). I am also committed to a wider sense of ethical responsibility through the contribution that this study makes to knowledge that address processes and practices of injustice within the social world (Porter, 1993). This dovetails with the wider critical theoretical framework elaborated in the previous chapter. Ethical considerations permeated all aspects of the research process. Guidance produced by the Institute of Education as well as other established professional bodies was consulted (e.g. BERA, 1992). It was vital that, from the start, TAs were made aware that the research was independent of the school or local authority. Reassurance was given to the gatekeepers (e.g. heads) that the research was not an evaluative exercise of the school and its practices.

It was critical to gain the *informed* consent of those directly involved in the study at various points within the research process, making sure they were explicitly aware of the nature and demands of the study and that they could withdraw at any time. I was sensitive to the fact that whilst it was essential to obtain the consent and permission of heads in order to conduct fieldwork in their schools, this was not the same as gaining the informed consent of TAs and teachers and other staff in the school. As Paechter perceptively notes:

it is often difficult to tell whether people are giving ready consent because they feel constrained to or because their institutional position is such that they do not feel threatened by possible research findings; by the time one has a sufficient understanding of the power relations of the institution it is far too late to make allowances for this, except in writing up. (1998: 101)

I was cognisant of existing power relations and that staff, particularly TAs, who are not generally in positions of authority, might be acquiescing to the research because their heads had agreed. Or, as occurred in Greenvale, staff were willing to be interviewed but the head was reluctant to allow this. Care was also taken not to be intrusive in informal observations. Building trust between the researcher and the researched was pivotal to creating a space where informants felt that their privacy and confidentiality were respected, especially during the interview interaction. This was an on-going process, which required constant attention.

Boundaries had to be negotiated which acknowledged the inequalities of roles and power. As Carspecken and Georgiou add: "Knowledge, in critical social research, is ... understood to be always a social product formed within social relations involving power" (2002: 689). In this study fieldwork relations were structured by class, race/ethnicity, gender and reflected in my ethno-racial positioning as a black African male researcher (Gunaratnam, 2003; Wright, 1998). As a racial minority in a white-dominated society, this might have positioned me as "other" in certain contexts. Similarly my gender identity within what was a predominantly female working environment had to be negotiated, in relation to parents and staff in both primary schools, the majority of whom were women. However, I feel that my experiences of working in a primary school, and the fact that I could share aspects of my identity with informants, enabled me to bridge or lessen some of these boundaries (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004). At the same time, I wanted some boundaries to remain, to have some

distance from those in whose occupational and, to a lesser extent, personal lives I had immersed myself. Writers have often described the ethnographic self that is constructed during fieldwork as one of “detached involvement” (Coffey, 1999), or of being a “professional stranger” (Agar, 1996), emphasising the flexibility and use of the researcher’s full expressive repertoire to stage their identities and manifest the required cultural style appropriate in each setting.

#### **4.6.1. The ethics of representation**

Informants were notified that the data generated would be anonymised and that they would be given pseudonyms. The pseudonyms chosen are intended to approximately reflect, in so far as it is possible to do so, the ethnic origin of the informant’s own original name. Guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality to participants, as I sought to do in this study, is a common practice in qualitative and ethnographic research and generally understood to be part of reflexive and ethical practice. Yet, as I came to write the thesis, I realised that anonymity and confidentiality are more complex processes than are often represented in published ethnographic work or methodological textbooks. I had naively thought that anonymisation of the school sites, neighbourhoods, and the use of pseudonyms for informants and removal of identifying site information would be sufficient. I had not actually questioned my rationale for doing so, other than as a strategic aspect of gaining access to school sites. Whilst these are *prima facie* good reasons for anonymisation, anonymity may not on closer inspection seem so principled. In this context Walford (2008) identifies a number of problems with ethnographers’ practices. First, he points out that fieldwork in schools over extended periods of time results in the researcher being known to a wide and extended network of people: governors, pupils, teachers, parents, TAs, casual visitors to the school, etc., who in turn might know each other. As ethnographers, we are encouraged to be open and honest, and to share information with informants and others we encounter in the field, yet in doing so, we potentially widen the network of those who know or are acquainted with our fieldwork presence and thus likely to identify our research sites. He adds that “with so many people knowing about the research, it is very difficult to hide the identity of the school or individuals involved if any of the reports have local or national exposure” (2008: 32). Second, it is quite likely that were any informants to read this thesis the use of pseudonyms would not prevent



them from recognising themselves or their colleagues in the data. This risks embarrassing and exposing participants to harm, particularly those who hold less power in organisations, such as TAs.

Equally disturbing are the epistemological implications of using pseudonyms in ethnographic research. For Walford, anonymisation often “naturalises the decoupling of events from historically and geographically specific locations ... [and] gives the findings of the research spurious generalizability” (2008: 35). Although readers might make such generalisations in any case, anonymity can serve to protect ethnographic work from criticism and challenge since it is never clear *where* the research was done. Arguably, this is counter to the virtues of ethnographic representation and its rich detailed *realistic* descriptions of places and practices in their social-historical, geographic contexts. Nespor also points to the inconsistencies of academic practice, noting that some authors reveal the identity of places the original researchers went to great lengths to disguise<sup>37</sup>. He also observes that anonymisation is attractive because it serves “the static, abstract space of academic discourse and its attendant theoretical constructs and claims” (2000: 551). Thus, it is argued, there is a trade-off between the “idea of the people in that institution as real biographical entities such ourselves [and them being] ... descriptive fragments illustrating constructs of sociological discourse” (2000: 552).

These are philosophically deep issues, which may not be tractable or reconcilable with our practices. In respect of this study, the length of time from fieldwork to published analysis may be important in any consideration of the merits of anonymisation. Nonetheless, I have attempted throughout this study to address some of these dilemmas, by providing as detailed an account of the socio-demographic, historical specificity of Croxfield, the neighbourhoods of Northwick and Earlsdale, and the school sites, whilst at the same time attempting to balance my ethical responsibility to informants and the schools involved by ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity through strategic use of vagueness at undisclosed points, paraphrasing rather than directly quoting from official reports and other such textual devices. I have made as transparent as possible the conduct and analysis of this study so that the reader is in a

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<sup>37</sup> Walford gives examples of well-known ethnographies where he was able uncover the identity of the schools with ease using the World-Wide-Web (2008).

good position to judge how well my claims are supported by the data. However, in the final analysis, the reader has to place trust in my integrity and reflexive observance of high ethical standards.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has provided an account of the general methodological approach taken in this study; the biographical and other influences on the research aims and processes; how the selection and negotiation of access to schools conducted; the general orientation towards critical ethnography and the ethical challenges faced in undertaking fieldwork; and the inferential procedures used in the analysis. I have illustrated the somewhat contingent, “messy” and uncertain nature of actual research practice and its reconstructed logic as presented in the linear form of a thesis. I have broadly argued for a methodological approach that is congruent with the wider theoretical framework used in the thesis, and the empirical realities under investigation: linking “the detailed analysis of what people do, say, and think in the actual flow of momentary experience” (Collins, 1981: 984), to wider macro-social relations of power, in order to explicate how “the effects of a complex, stratified industrial society penetrate the school” (Sharp and Green, 1975: viii). Whilst this study is responsive to contemporary currents in sociological and ethnographic research which call for greater self-reflexivity (Coffey, 1999; Sangren, 2007), the overall presentation and style is very much in the vein of what John Van Maanen (1988) refers to as a “realist tale”. This is a mode of ethnographic representation which emphasises the legitimacy and authenticity of the account presented, through its authorial voice and analytical framing. It is partly a rhetorical device and, as indicated, a reflection of some of the epistemological commitments of a broadly critical-realist position. I do not claim “objective” knowledge, nor would I suggest that an ethnographic methodology in general, and my research design in particular, are without their limitations. However, I do make a claim of knowledge, however imperfect. Knowledge production is *fallible* and *partial*, and the concepts through which social enquiry is conducted are mediated by language and social practices. However, our theories are more than just hermetically-sealed representations, more than just textual games of deconstruction in which we indulge (Sayer, 1993). Whilst other equally valid possible narratives and analyses could have been written from this fieldwork, the narratives presented reflect and intersect with

*my* concerns, *my* biography and interests, and *my* theoretical inclinations. I will return to reconsider some of these issues in the closing chapter but for now it is to the empirical case study that I turn in chapter 5. I introduce Plumtree and Greenvale and their differing locations, socially, culturally and symbolically within their respective fields of gentrification.

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## Chapter 5 – Topographies of Gentrification

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To make the link between locality as a property of social life and neighbourhoods as social forms requires a more careful exposition of the problem of context. The production of neighbourhoods is always historically grounded and thus contextual. That is, neighbourhoods are inherently what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighbourhoods. (Appadurai, 1996: 182-183)

How are differences and divisions between and within gentrifying neighbourhoods produced and experienced? This chapter begins the task of addressing the issue of the *location* of urban schools within urban class relations by examining the topography of the field of gentrification in Northwick and Earlsdale. If we are to explain the consequences of class colonisation, and the form it takes, we need to understand the groups involved, their positions and perspectives in social space. This is necessary for understanding the interconnections between TAs' positioning within the wider social space and the narrower spaces of their working lives; and explicating some of the underlying tensions and forms of contestation which resurface, albeit in different forms, within the institutional contexts of school.

Previous work, as discussed in chapter 2, has suggested that class colonisation of urban schools is an outcome of middle-class hegemony in deprived urban localities. This chapter paints a more complex and nuanced picture. Class colonisation emerges and articulates with wider processes of gentrification in different and contrasting ways in Northwick and Earlsdale. I illustrate the importance of interaction rituals, particularly those in public spaces, in providing the performative contexts in which emotionally-affecting place-based middle-class identities emerge. This in turn generates the symbolic forms which are transposed and deployed in service of ideological investments and commitments in the production of gentrified neighbourhoods and schools. In addition, I show that the formation of middle-class identity and habitus is *relational* and must be explicated with reference to how the same neighbourhoods are understood and experienced by working-class groups – namely black, white and Turkish.

Since the theme of gentrification and class colonisation only emerged within the fieldwork, I draw upon analysis of a wide range of data (more so than in the following chapters), including geo-demographic typologies, participant observation, interviews with parents, TAs, teachers, as well as *reinterpretations* of existing academic and/or journalistic accounts, to render a ethnographically realistic portrait of the “social cosmos” as it was lived and experienced in Northwick and Earlsdale (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97).

### **5.1. Northwick and its gentrifiers**

Plumtree is an unassuming primary school building located in Northwick, a neighbourhood in the north-west of Croxfield, a densely-populated, ethnically-diverse and immensely deprived inner-city London borough that “displays some of the most dramatic and intractable hallmarks of social and economic decline in Britain” (Perrons and Skyers, 2003: 273). Opened in 1965, on the site of a former secondary school built in 1926, the school is housed in a two-storey modern building surrounded by generously-proportioned three- to four-storey Victorian terraces, popular with the incoming middle-classes. The school is located on Oakland Avenue, a busy road which connected the inhabitants living on many of its radial roads to Berry Street, a popular gentrified commercial and leisure space. The geography of neighbourhood gentrification outside the school gates was clear and conspicuous. One longstanding teacher at Plumtree described the school in the following way, which highlighted the bifurcated landscape of Northwick and the school’s intersecting position within it:

This area became a massive area for young families to move into, it’s literally two sides of the track as they would say in the Southern States of America. On this side of the school [gestures towards the Victorian terraces], you have the owner occupiers, who are mostly white ... Behind the school, there are the estates, which a significant proportion of the white working-class community live, [and] mainly the black and Turkish population.

(Peter, Plumtree-Deputy: IT21-02-05).

Northwick has had a continuous history of small-scale gentrification stretching back to the 1970s, making it one of the most middle class neighbourhoods in Croxfield (Butler, 1995). This was reflected in its socio-economic profile, which shows evidence of a significant home-owning, university-educated, middle-class population in professional and managerial occupations. In a study of gentrification in the 1990s, Northwick was

described as being “predominantly white and working class” (1996: 195). This could no longer (in the 2000s) be so boldly stated.

The neighbourhood was experiencing an intense period of gentrification, bolstered by a long housing boom which started in the late 1990s. Many of its residential roads had been thoroughly reworked, creating an aesthetic uniformity that lent them a genteel ambience. For several decades, the gentrification of Northwick had drawn white middle-class fractions, attracted to its large, relatively affordable Victorian properties (although by the time of the fieldwork these were at a premium); its proximity to the cultural and consumption spaces of central London; the “vibrancy arising from the mix of ethnic cultures” (Ball *et al.*, 2004: 483); the architectural style of its civic buildings and the abundance of open green spaces (Butler, 1991, 1995); its rich historical heritage; and, more recently, its own localised consumption infrastructure and the density of parents with young children.

Butler (1995) has identified gentrification within Northwick with the class formation of the white “new cultural class”; university-educated professionals such as teachers, lawyers, social workers, journalists, artists, academics, etc. This was a group oriented towards the “discursive”, with high levels of cultural and social capital, and relatively low levels of economic capital in relation to other middle-class fractions. Butler’s gentrifiers were, in the main, from established suburban middle-class backgrounds rather than being socially mobile from the working-class. In terms of political inclination, as Butler (1995: 201) found amongst his informants, over two-thirds had intended to vote for the Labour Party and had done so in previous elections.

This resonates with my own findings. Amongst my sample of middle-class parents and their partners there were: four journalists working for national newspapers, four solicitors, a press photographer, a music promoter, a writer, a medical research scientist, a painter, and four education professionals. The majority were educated to degree level and above and most came from the south-east of England. Butler (1995: 201) suggests “perhaps the single clearest indicator of ‘who’ these people are is given by the daily paper they read”: geo-demographic data for Northwick indicates that residents were over five times more likely than the national average to be readers of *The Guardian* – widely regarded as the voice of the liberal intelligentsia. This political

liberalism was reflected in the valuing of diversity, social integration and inclusion. The middle-class self-image was couched in terms of a tolerant urban “cosmopolitan” orientation, which according to Hannerz “entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences” (1996: 103). The implied contrast was with other middle-class settlements, in the suburbs and elsewhere in London, which supposedly lacked this orientation.

As gentrification intensified and became more extensive, the middle-classes appropriated the spaces and places of Northwick, investing them with new meanings and symbols, guided by the idea of the neighbourhood as a quintessential “English village”. This image and its associated iconography and historical symbolism were powerful guiding metaphors for the middle-class. Wright explained that:

Northwick is not so much a literal place as a cultural oscillation between the prosaic reality of the contemporary inner city and an imaginative reconstruction of the area’s past as a dissenting settlement. ... For those who want it, this imagined past will keep looming into view. (1985: 211)

This idyllic construction of Northwick was reflected in informants’ comments: “It’s great, it’s like a little village ... I really like living around here, my kids are very happy,’ there’s a lot of social life going on” (Kirsten, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04). This appropriation was most evident within the consumption field, where the incoming middle-class have displaced and imprinted their values and “tastes” upon what was previously a working-class retail environment. Berry Street, the neighbourhood’s main gentrified commercial and leisure thoroughfare, was a particularly important locus of social relations and the expression and mediation of middle-class identities. It provided gentrifiers with some of the most evocative and emotionally-engrossing moments of identification with place and each other; it was where the middle-class habitus most loudly resonated in synchrony. The preponderance of establishments on Berry Street where the middle-class could meet, converse, drink and eat provided opportunities for the enactment of *sociable* interaction rituals: the kinds of talk and exchange which created and sustained social and symbolic ties of group membership. These reliable sociable rituals strengthened individuals’ identity and sense of social location, and were the main mechanism through which people experienced what they referred to as “community”. At the same time, these rituals reified middle-class cultural style and capital within public spaces and reinforced a sense of ownership of these spaces. The

following extract, from a white middle-class mother, quoted in a lifestyle article on Northwick, in a national newspaper, was illustrative of this dominant narrative:

The parks and the cafes are inundated with kids. Berry Street is full of blokes wearing square-rimmed specs pushing buggies. It's great to have other people in a similar situation for socialising, because you have similar interests and needs. ... If I lived in an area with fewer parents I'd feel more vulnerable. I'm so stuck in the island of Northwick that I never really get much contact with people outside. All the facilities are in a small area ... all on Berry Street. In the organic food shop there are even miniature trolleys for the kids to push.

(Melanie, quoted in Templeton, 2004)

Northwick, from Melanie's perspective, appeared to be socially-encapsulated and severed from its "urban" location, a convivial space of like-minded "people like us". Within the symbolic geography of the white middle-classes Northwick was an enclave, an imagined island – the village in the inner-city, in which threatening others have been banished *outside* to what was then conceptualised as "Croxfield proper". This theme is reflected in an extract from one of May's informants in his study of the area: "I've got the best of both worlds. ... Northwick's nice because it's close to things that are interesting but you can also get away from it because it's sanitised, and safe" (Amanda quoted in May, 1996: 210). As Amanda observed, Northwick was "safe", whereas the outside world, by implication, was dangerous. The urban working-classes with whom Northwick was shared were largely invisible from this perspective. Working-class occlusion *within* Northwick was an important aspect of middle-class symbolic power. In re-shaping the meanings of Northwick and Croxfield, the middle-class were destabilising the meanings it held for other groups, and generating problems of *recognition* and *identity*. A Northwick parent who identified as being from a white working-class background in Croxfield, and had experienced some social mobility, told me how her cultural style and performative identity presented difficulties for white middle-class parents in situated interactions:

People are amazed that I come from around here, they are absolutely amazed. [Ayo: why's that?] I think they find me very hard to work out, I think I don't fit into too many boxes, I'm just not a picture of a person who's born in Croxfield to them, because I am not as working-class as they would expect somebody to be who was born here ... obviously I am not black or some of the other groups that people might attach or think as belonging to Croxfield.

(Kelly, Plumtree-Parent-Governor: IT11-07-05)



As Butler observed: “despite the fact that they are a minority group [within Northwick] and talk (in abstract terms at least) about liking social mix, they are largely ‘blind’ to other social groups. They do not know them, don’t interact with them and tend to forget they exist” (1997: 129). The urban working-classes, a heterogeneous fraction, however, do exist, and it is their different social locations and perspectives that I turn to next.

## **5.2.      *The working-classes***

Plumtree backs onto a small, narrow path that leads to the Dunlop estate. Walking in the estate revealed a glimpse of a different, more constricted social universe, and experiences at variance with the sense of locality that gentrifiers have of Northwick. In the recent past, this and other adjacent council estates had provided the majority of Plumtree’s intake. The estate itself was a maze of low-rise three- to four-storey blocks containing flats and maisonettes (some with gardens), a few tower blocks and small corner shops. Overcrowding was a common problem, particularly amongst households with children<sup>38</sup>. Some parts of the estate were well-tended and others showed signs of neglect. This estate, and others like it, was home to a deprived and ethnically-heterogeneous working-class population comprising mainly black and Turkish-speaking minority ethnic groups in addition to the white working-class. Of those in employment the majority were in manual and unskilled occupations or low-paying service and clerical work; a significant proportion were in receipt of state benefits. Unemployment was high amongst black and minority ethnic groups (CBC, 2006a, 2006b). The ACORN classification for the Dunlop estate indicated that a majority of its residents were “hard pressed”, with little discretionary income after household bills.

The white working-class were once the dominant group within this area and their social and cultural presence has diminished considerably. As the area economically declined in the 1970s and 1980s, this group found itself competing for ever scarcer resources (particularly jobs and housing) with Caribbean and Turkish-speaking groups. Many within this group interpreted the ethnic minority presence as heralding a decline, both in the area’s fortunes and in remembered forms of white working-class

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<sup>38</sup> 46 per cent of all under 20s in Croxfield lived in overcrowded accommodation with significantly higher proportions amongst black and minority ethnic groups (CBC, 2006a: 43)

sociability. The area was seen to have lost its “Englishness” and thereby its “white” identity. As May found in his research in the 1990s, this had led to resentment, opposition and a growing sense of isolation. As this quote from an informant in May’s study illustrates:

I mean, you’ve got a lot of Kurds coming in now, and they’ve got ... all the little shops in the High Street, all the green grocers. It annoys the local people because they work 24 hours a day ... And they’re getting houses, causing resentment with people who’ve been on the waiting list for years and years and years. (1996: 201)

Substantial inward migration of Turkish speakers began in the 1970s, and at the present time comprised a heterogeneous group in terms of legal status, length of settlement, nationality (e.g. Turkey, Cyprus and elsewhere in the Middle East), and ethnicity (Kurdish, Alevi etc.). As a group they suffered from particularly high rates of unemployment and those in work were concentrated in a limited number of sectors within Croxfield or adjacent boroughs: catering (fast-food restaurants, cafés), clothing shops and manufacture, groceries, hair styling, photographic studios, and manual occupations such as vehicle repair (York, 2002). This made them highly visible as a mercantile fraction of the working-class as highlighted in the extract from May’s study. Within the school system, Turkish-speaking children, in common with other minority ethnic children in Croxfield, suffered from educational disadvantage (Mehmet Ali, 2001). The marginalisation experienced by Turkish speakers was compounded by difficulties with the English language. Their position in the social space therefore evidenced elements of cultural and social encapsulation, in tandem with integration in the wider local working-class through the housing, educational and consumption fields. As significant agents in the local commercial sphere, some perceived the slow and steady encroachment of middle-class “taste” and consumption infrastructure emanating from Berry Street as a threat to their sense of identity and place.

I think most of these businesses will be closing up, with estate agents moving in and people going out to do their shopping somewhere else. That’s the impact that I see. You are getting more sort of yuppie people coming into the area looking for cafés and wine bars. With the different type of people coming in, I don’t know how long I’m going to last here. We’ll just have to wait and see.

(Tercan, Shoe repair business owner of 22 years quoted in Richards, 2005)

Amongst Turkish-speaking youth, mostly British-born, class position was mediated by the shared interaction rituals and alternative forms of cultural capital operative on neighbourhood “streets” and estates. Theirs was a hybrid habitus, expressing the intersectionality of cultural style and situated enactments. This theme is expanded by a Kurdish community worker in Northwick:

In terms of the youth there is a big problem in terms of culture, and identifying itself ... They have an interesting mixture, between their Turkish-Kurdish identity and the street culture in Croxfield, they'll listen to a Turkish song followed by Tupac [a black US rapper] ... They are trying to catch a certain synthesis ... [The] mentality of the first generation is still around, there isn't an alternative way ... The prevailing thing is what the daddies and the mothers say, about how to live, and that does have an influence, but it's also a reflection of the way people see themselves, they are becoming, basically their situation is becoming on par with the rest of the working-class, the lower echelons of the society.

(Ümut, Kurdish-Community-Worker: IT27-04-05)

As the quote above highlights, there were new urban bonds being forged between working-class youth across ethnic lines, through participation in what several of my working-class interviewees referred to as “street culture”. The issue of “street culture” was significant amongst working-class interviewees as it often arose in relation to talk about black youth and problematic masculinities.

Similarly structurally-located, black groups – largely of Caribbean origin – have had a more fraught relationship with many of the mainstream institutions and other groups in the locality. Historically, social relations between black groups and wider public institutions, particularly the police, have been framed by antagonism, fuelled by mistrust, police harassment and brutality, and general experiences of “over-policing” (McCrystal, 1993). Institutional racism in the educational system, labour and housing markets, have contributed to the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, and a disproportionate concentration of black groups in some of the notorious estates in Northwick (CBC, 2005b; Harrison, 1985). The criminalisation of black groups, in particular young males, has mediated relationships between members of this group and other members of the working-class. May found in his earlier study in the 1990s that for some white working-class residents, the minority ethnic presence, especially black groups, was “understood as both feeding the area's crime rate and destroying the traditions of neighbourliness” (1996: 201). As one of his white working-class

informants said: "I think I'm not biased, but there is the crime rate, which the people always seem to blame on the black people – right or wrong" (1996: 201). Fear and concerns about safety generated by crime, therefore, coalesced around anxieties about black youth and their implied threat to law and order. Drug dealing, street robberies and interpersonal violence were key concerns amongst tenants in Northwick's estates<sup>39</sup>. The borough profile<sup>40</sup> noted that there were "a significant number of residents who are vulnerable to becoming victims of crime and disorder or committing offences" (2005b: 3). This sense of danger was shaped by local media representations, as well as situated interactions in public spaces.

You can't always believe everything you read, but what you can see on the news every day, the drugs, and the gun crime ... it's very worrying, it wasn't that type of violence in this area [Northwick] when my children were young, I didn't have the same fear.

(Sue, Plumtree-TA: IT19-01-05)

A number of public figures linked the high rates of violent interpersonal crimes, and the involvement of black youth, with an often undefined "street culture" (Golan, 2006). The stigmatising association with crime provided the context in which the black habitus was formed, and shaped how members of the black working-class were perceived and treated, particularly in public interactions.

Respectability, as Skeggs (1997) has argued, has been a central and powerful organising ethical value within working-class life, as a way of situating oneself in the symbolic and cultural economy of value. As she noted: "respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others, how we know who we are (or are not)" (1997: 1). This claim to respectability and its expression through attention to self-presentation was a common theme amongst the two black mothers I interviewed. As Jennifer explained:

I am trying to instil in him that it's important ... to give a good impression, rather than to be you know, the type of child bouncing around with their trousers round their hips etc., this bad boy attitude.

(Jennifer, Plumtree-Parent: IT9-06-05)

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<sup>39</sup> According to a survey of council tenants in Croxfield, the majority (47 per cent) do not feel safe walking alone in their area after dark, compared to a figure of 32 per cent nationally (CBC, 2005a).

<sup>40</sup> This was a statistical document produced by the Local Authority.

For families like these, there was a constant tension in their claims for respectability which meant a disavowal of and social distance from those who threatened their claims for social mobility. Thus, the negotiation of the “abject” reflected parents’ awareness of the social production of stigma attached to black cultural styles.

Overall, the urban working-class of Northwick were a heterogeneous group, who shared similar material conditions and positions in the social space. The next section shows how the different social formations of class, indicative of different habitus and perspectives, intersected within the field of schooling. For the middle-classes this meant an encounter with working-class otherness, which as I have illustrated was largely absent within their hegemonic experience of the locality. Plumtree thus emerges as a contested site of class struggle and desire.

### **5.3. *Plumtree in the gentrified imagination***

Since opening in 1965, Plumtree has been a typical urban primary, in that it has educated the multi-ethnic working-class population of Northwick. In common with the majority of primary schools in Croxfield, it has had a highly ethnically-diverse working-class intake, in which white British pupils were a minority (CBC, 2006a, 2006b). The intake had changed dramatically in the five years prior to fieldwork in 2004-05. Children from middle-class backgrounds now comprised a majority amongst the white British pupils, as the proportions of minority ethnic pupils and those from poorer families decreased. For example, the percentage of children who have EAL, at 16 per cent<sup>41</sup>, had declined steeply from 1997 when it was 47 per cent. However, Plumtree was still, at the time of fieldwork, a diverse school by any measure, with a slight majority of pupils from non-white British ethnic backgrounds. It had a good reputation and tended to outperform the Croxfield average at national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. It was thus attractive to almost all parents.

Several of the working-class pupils were children of former pupils. As one black working-class parent told me: “Plumtree was one of the schools I selected because I went there myself, and it’s always had a good reputation, I mean I was happy there” (Jennifer, Parent: IT9-06-05). The criteria for gaining a place at Plumtree were:

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<sup>41</sup> This can be contrasted with a Croxfield average of 53 per cent at the time.

proximity within the catchment area, having siblings at the school and having diagnosed SEN. The catchment area was highly circumscribed – measured in metres – and gaining a place was very difficult. Living within the catchment area of Plumtree carried a significant housing premium, which reflected its visibility within the field of gentrification within Croxfield and beyond.

Plumtree has a very good reputation. In fact we moved here, we needed a bigger house anyway, but we specifically moved to be as near Plumtree as we could get, that was one of the considerations when we bought our house.

(Cynthia, Plumtree-Chair-of-PC: IT4-03-05)

When asked about why they chose Plumtree for their children, several parents made reference to the “relaxed atmosphere” of the school as a factor in their choice, relating to what Bernstein (1975b) referred to as the “expressive order”. A typical response from one parent: “Plumtree just struck me as being well-organised without being rigid, just kind of had a nice atmosphere; sometimes you walk into places, and you just think ‘ooh, this is nice’” (Jane, Parent: IT12-11-04).

The change in the racial, ethnic and class profile of the pupil intake from 2000 to 2005 had been dramatic. Whilst the intense period of middle-class settlement was generally cited as the main reason for this, most staff were less clear on how the middle-class had been able to gain access to Plumtree so quickly given the restrictive catchment rules, which would tend to favour existing working-class pupils who lived for example in the Dunlop estate. My interviews with parents suggested two additional factors which were less evident to staff. Two parents independently told me that the point from which proximity to the school was determined had changed in the period coinciding with intense gentrification. Previously, the distance was calculated from the “back gate”, which opened up to the alleyway leading to the estate; now it was measured from the “front” gate which faced the Victorian terraces and radial roads favoured by the middle-class. Also, one parent openly admitted that she and her partner owned two homes in Northwick: a flat on the same street as the school, within the catchment area, and the family home slightly further away. Other parents reported that they knew of others renting or buying additional property to secure a place at Plumtree. It was impossible to gauge the impact of such covert practices on gaining admission but they were likely to have been significant.

Amongst my middle-class parent interviewees, some had considered other schools, often outside of Northwick, and most lamented what they considered the lack of “choice” within Northwick, and in Croxfield in general<sup>42</sup>. Other nearby schools, with significantly larger working-class and minority ethnic populations, were rarely mentioned and generally not considered within the realm of possibility: “There really isn’t a great amount of good schools around here ... It was a good school and there were no other choices. (Kirsten, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04).

Only three of the fifteen parents I interviewed mentioned the nearest school to Plumtree (Creswell), which had a predominantly black working-class intake. Two of these were black and the third was a middle-class parent who was highly critical of white middle-class influence at Plumtree. Although few said so directly, it was clear that the social mix in schools like Creswell, predominantly working-class and minority ethnic, was an underlying concern. Choosing Plumtree, it seems, was a reflection of the wider middle-class avoidance of other schools: “It’s very interesting, because ... we are literally – marooned in the middle here. And then around us, all our neighbouring schools have got black – mainly black population” (Yvette, Plumtree-Teacher: IT23-06-04).

It is unlikely, given my appearance as a black male, that parents would have been explicit in discussing some of their views in relation to school choice and racial/social issues. I found, however, that amongst some of the middle-class parents who had older children and thus had a longer relationship with the school, the “social mix”, the diversity of Plumtree’s intake, was one of the aspects which they found attractive about the school: in other words, its reflection and articulation with the *urban* elements of the locality. There were thus indications of *ideological* differences amongst middle-class parents. There were those who saw Plumtree as a choice which reflected their valuing of social and cultural diversity:

Yeah, I mean that was one of the things that – that I think – when she [the daughter] started here, that I was really ... glad about ... [that] there was a big mixture of kids in her class ... I mean I would definitely much rather they had that than, you know, they went to the school where all the kids were sort of very much the same. (Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04)

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<sup>42</sup> A new primary school had opened just prior to the fieldwork period, and was mentioned by some parents, but it was generally considered a “risky” proposition with no established “community”.

In contrast, there were others, often newer parents, for whom Plumtree was valued to the extent that it appeared detached socially, culturally and symbolically from its urban location and in tune with the gentrified habitus. For them, the value of Plumtree lay in the possibilities for transformation and alignment with the dominant iconographies of place. The complexities of such a perspective are illustrated by Amy, a highly-involved, white middle-class parent-governor. She began by telling me why she selected Plumtree: “I chose this school for my children because it had a very good reputation and, secondly, it’s a smaller school, it’s a single-class intake, and it had very much a villagey [sic] feel to it” (Amy: IT9-11-04). As Amy went on to explain, the “village” aura, so important to wider experiences of “community” within Northwick, was indicative of other highly desired symbols of belonging:

basically the feel of school, the fact that it’s bright and cheerful, it’s small, there’s nothing anonymous about it, it feels like an extended family ... the building is very small and intimate, and it’s a statement of place and belonging for children, in a small environment where everybody knows each other. I think it gives them a strong sense of belonging, and therefore they can develop their own identities. They don’t feel one of a big group.

(Amy, Plumtree-Parent-Governor: IT9-11-04)

The smallness of the school – not unique in the neighbourhood – in Amy’s account is symbolic of *familial* forms of social relations. Ideas of safety, equated with the notion of the school as an extended family, are in play. There are also implicit oppositions of light, darkness, anonymity and familiarity. Plumtree, as a school, is represented as an *a priori* experience of community, a statement of place, and simultaneously a space where children can “develop their own identities”. These oppositions and tropes are concretised as Amy discusses another school nearby, which was also popular with some white middle-class parents – and to which she had sent one of her older children – and which was considerably larger with more ethnic and social class diversity:

This is not a typical inner-city, Croxfield school ... My first child went to another school, Xavier school, which ... has a very good reputation, but it’s a two-class intake, and it’s an old Victorian building ... The size of the building, lots of stairs, it’s very high ... and the fact that there’s two-class intake immediately doubles the size of the school, so the sort of total familiarity, the feel changes, and that’s very much a London – it feels like a London school ... It has a much greater ethnic mix, which gives it a much richer and varied cultural feeling about the school, but I just feel children are very small, and if they have a very strong sense of belonging, they will thrive, and I think they get



that in a smaller community – it's a like an extended family: do you live in an extended family or do you live in a city, that's the only way I can describe it really.

(Amy, Plumtree-Parent-Governor: IT9-11-04)

For Amy, the multicultural diversity of Xavier Primary School, a traditional urban primary, its richness and variedness, is detrimental to the social development of white middle-class identities – a “strong sense of belonging”. The implication is that middle-class children are particularly vulnerable and perhaps need protection from urban working-class children (Reay, 2004d). She poses the choice between Plumtree and Xavier school in very stark and opposing terms, connecting the familial with the village and thereby the non-urban (i.e. the country), and the city with the unfamiliar and a threat to the successful reproduction of white middle-class identity. In order for this imposition to work, the village idyll is conceived as tranquil and genteel, with an implied ethnic and cultural homogeneity, in which the primacy of face-to-face interaction and sociality is maintained, or has not yet been lost. In this narrative, sociality is posited as dense and transparent; in other words, everybody knows everybody else, an “extended family”. Conversely, in the city, social relations are specified and/or opaque; schools and streets are populated with anonymous, racially- and culturally-different “strangers”. As Bauman (2001: 10) argues, the kind of community that is sought is one that does not require communication, it is presupposed. The community being evoked, he suggests, “stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess” (2001: 3). For Amy, and many other middle-class parents, Plumtree seemed to be the resolution to the dilemma of the excessive richness and attraction of the urban. It offered “some spiritual comfort: the prospect of making togetherness easier to bear by cutting off the effort to understand, to negotiate, to compromise, that living amidst and with difference requires” (Bauman, 2003: 110).

Plumtree, therefore, offered a seductive sense of place in the social order for those seeking it, in what was an imagined place-image of arcadia, concretised in the neighbourhood habitus of living with like-minded people. Whilst this perspective was in the process of becoming the dominant reading of Plumtree, some of the middle-class parents I spoke to were critical of this narrative, demonstrating their attachment to

alternative constructions of Plumtree as an *urban* school. This is illustrated by Shona; during our interview, in a spontaneous response to a copy of the school prospectus that she had in her hand, she commented:

the message it's trying to say, [sarcastic tone] is that we might be in deepest darkest Croxfield, but, you know, you will recognise our school, it will be like the school you went to when you were little, I think that's the message they are trying to give out ... a lot of the parents moving in the area are arty-farty, so I am sure that appeals to them.

(Shona, Plumtree-Parent: IT3-11-04)

Shona felt – as indicated in the extract through her sarcastic emphasis and use of the racialised phrase “deepest darkest Croxfield” to allude to the presence of “difference” within Northwick – that there was an attempt at symbolic erasure (through selective photography which focused on the foundation stage where there were fewer black and minority ethnic children) of the school’s multi-ethnic diversity. Critiques such as these, aimed at reasserting the identity of Plumtree as a school materially and socially connected to *Croxfield*, whilst significant, were in general only available to white middle-class parents. For the few working-class parents with whom I spoke, whilst their engagement with Plumtree was complex, it was not anchored to this particular habitus and its imaginative framing.

The situation and position of Greenvale within Earlsdale, which I shall discuss in the next section, are different. Here, class power and conflict are less cloaked, more confrontational and the context more unsettled during the period of the research.

#### **5.4. Earlsdale: living on the edge**

Greenvale Primary School is a large Victorian school, opened in 1894. It is located in Earlsdale, a neighbourhood in the south-east of Croxfield, a few miles south of Northwick. The majority of the school is still housed in the original imposing Victorian buildings. The current school was the result of an amalgamation of the Infant and Junior schools in the early 1990s. Greenvale is situated geographically at the centre of Earlsdale. It sat impressively on the corner of Earlsdale Park, towering over the “artisan cottages” and elegant Victorian terraces – which have proved popular with gentrifiers – and flanked on several sides by low and high-rise council blocks, with the once ominous presence of the Carlton estate in the distance.

There was feverish building activity in the neighbourhood during the fieldwork period, as private developers competed to erect new residential property. This part of the neighbourhood abounded in warehouse conversions and live/work units. The growing number of estate agents on Deacon Street, the main commercial retail space, signalled that the middle-class had arrived en masse. The few working-class families in home ownership in desirable artisan cottages, according to one informant: “have sold up and moved out, taken advantage of the silly prices” (Stuart, Greenvale-Teacher: IT28-04-05). Unlike in Northwick, the geography of gentrification was not particularly visible. Although there had been previous waves of small-scale gentrification in Earlsdale, in the 1980s and 1990s – forging a continuous middle-class presence within the neighbourhood – it does not seem to have been concentrated or consolidated. It was an ethnically-diverse area with a majority working-class population and an increasing middle-class one.

#### **5.4.1. The Carlton estate and the working-class habitus**

The working-class population resided predominantly in the several council estates which stretched out across Earlsdale. The formation of the working-class habitus, however, cannot be understood without reference to the Carlton estate, which held a unique place in the history of Earlsdale. The Carlton estate was built as a part of the slum clearances in the early 1970s. Its sheer size and proximity to Greenvale meant that it had provided a significant proportion of Greenvale’s intake over the decades. Its residents accounted for roughly half of the population of Earlsdale in the 1991 census, numbering several thousand. The deprivation and poverty within the estate has had a deep and profound impact on the character of public culture and social interactions, the place-image of Earlsdale held by all residents, and the wider perceptions of the neighbourhood.

The Carlton estate had been a warren of densely built low-rise blocks plus four tower blocks. Acrimonious relations between an increasingly racially-diverse tenant population, coupled with high crime and victimisation rates, drove away many of the more resourceful families. It soon acquired an unenviable reputation and only those with no options were allocated properties there. Consequently, the proportion of black and other minority ethnic families and single parents rose, reinforcing the exodus

of the better-off (particularly amongst the white working-class). By the early 1980s, a majority of the tenants on the estate were from black minority groups. What had been intended as urban showcase of housing for the working-classes when built soon became an exemplar for all the wrong reasons:

[The] snake blocks had a forbidding, prison-like appearance, on the inside, their long internal corridors and enclosed staircases were particularly vulnerable to burglary and muggings. A catalogue of design and construction errors including leaking roofs, condensation, heavy insect infestations and poor sound/thermal insulations. The woes of the estate were compounded by deep-seated and widespread social, economic and health problems. (Carr, Sefton-Green and Tissier, 2001: 169)

The estate became a moral prism and metonym through which gentrifiers (small and sporadic in number) viewed the impoverished working-class tenants. This theme is reflected in the comments of Wright, an academic who lived opposite the estate for several years during the 1980s:

I've been looking at the Carlton estate for years. Its four nineteen storey tower blocks are widely deplored on this side ... We survey the burned-out flats with their shattered windows and we shudder. We read of the drug-dealing, the murders, and the sporadic defenestration, maintaining our own informal body count with the help of the Croxfield Chronicle. When we get burgled we have a way of glancing up accusingly through long-suffering sash windows ... the council tower block serves as a generator of infernal meanings for people who only look at it from outside. (1993: 174)

As the 1980s drew to a close, over 80 per cent of Carlton residents were on Croxfield's housing transfer list, desperate to escape. A quarter of properties on the estate were squatted (Jacobs, 1999: 393). With unemployment at 30 per cent and less than 20 per cent of the adult population economically active, crime and drug abuse were rife. In 1992, the estate was earmarked for a highly publicised full-scale "regeneration" at a cost of 92 million pounds, only 20 years into its 60-year design life-cycle. The outcome of the redevelopment reflected the new prevailing ideology on tackling urban poverty and urban regeneration, that of "mixed communities". Originally the Carlton estate consisted of 1,145 properties under council ownership. When in 2003 the rebuild was completed, a seismic shift in the socio-tenorial basis of the estate had taken place. Of the housing stock, 20 per cent was sold to owner-occupiers on the open market, 55 per cent transferred to housing associations and

only 20 per cent remained under council ownership. Moreover, only one third of the original tenants were rehoused in the new development. The majority were dispersed elsewhere. All but one of the tower blocks was demolished.

At the time of fieldwork, although most of the physical traces of the original buildings had gone, the legacy, name, and other symbols remained. Much of the stigma of living on the Carlton estate had dissipated as a result of the rebuild and the regenerated estate was better constructed, at significantly lower densities. It was once again desirable, a place where tenants wanted to be allocated rather than a last resort. It appeared to hold a positive place-image:

Carlton estate is a lovely place to live now, whereas before, years ago, I would not even dream of living in Carlton estate: If they'd offered me a place on Carlton, I would laugh, "don't think so!"

(Irene, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

Whilst, clearly, the physical fabric of the estate was rejuvenated, wider social and economic problems of joblessness and intergenerational disadvantage, crime and victimisation were still apparent. An established drugs market<sup>43</sup> and associated activities were clearly visible in and around the development. The ACORN typologies for the estate indicate that the majority of residents, like those in the Dunlop estate in Northwick, got by on low-incomes or benefits. The neighbourhood still manifested strong continuities with its history of social disadvantage. These themes are illustrated in the extract below from a local neighbourhood community forum meeting at the Carlton estate:

Everybody came – young people, elderly people, young mothers, men, women – because everyone is affected. People complained about drug dealers, prostitution and people defecating and vomiting in their gardens and stairwells ... The danger is that kids grow up thinking that this is normal as well as being frightening and disturbing. If you've got that kind of activity 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it's exhausting. Many people talked about the lack of activity for teenagers and children. And many parents said they were frightened of their children getting drawn into the drug activity through boredom and naivety.

(Resident quoted in Civic, 2005: 38)

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<sup>43</sup> The borough had one of the highest rates of crack cocaine use in England (Office for National Statistics, 2005a).

A sense that there was both continuity and change is reflected in this extract from a TA informant:

It's a lot better [in the regenerated estate], been there 10 years ... Yes, a lot better, now everybody is in charge of their own front door ... The last lot of us, who used to live next each other in the tower block, all ended up living next door to each other ... So, we all knew each other from the block anyway, with us, [but] you've got other roads on the development where there's gangs of kids hanging out, there's graffiti going on, this happening, and fights happening and whatever else.

(Yolanda, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05)

Regeneration has also explicitly encouraged middle-class settlement in the revamped estate, and there were indications that many of the public services were being co-opted by this more assertive middle-class group:

I've lived in Carlton estate since 1985. I lived in the old Carlton estate and now the new [estate]. When Tony Blair [former Labour Prime Minister] visited we had this brilliant under-fives centre. Lots of cameras came and it was all lovely. But now I can't get my child in there and neither can my neighbour – it doesn't seem to be *for estate people*.

(Resident quoted in Civic, 2005: 38, emphasis added)

Increased private investment by property developers was contrasted with public divestment by one informant who lived in an adjacent council estate: "All the pubs have been knocked down. They are all being made into flats. There isn't any like community getting together is there, really. They've sort of like taken all of that away" (Vicky, Greenvale-TA: IT18-04-05).

Regeneration, it appears, has managed what earlier attempts in the 1980s by "the usual clutch of lifestyle journalists" and estate agents could not achieve: to dissociate Earlsdale from the image of "the abysmal Carlton estate" (Wright, 1991: 156). Whilst the most recent phase of gentrification in Earlsdale was not solely a consequence of the demolition of the Carlton estate, it was a significant factor. In removing some of Earlsdale's most deprived resident tenants, the council and its private partners have undeniably made the area open and amenable to intense developer-/private household-led gentrification (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Ruming, Mee and McGuirk, 2004). Gentrification and regeneration were thus mutually reinforcing processes: capital and collective action were in synchrony. In the next section, I describe the social formation and perspectives of the white middle-class in Earlsdale.

#### 5.4.2. The middle-class habitus

Gentrifiers in Earlsdale shared many characteristics with, and embodied, the dispositions and formative experiences of the culturally-endowed middle-class fraction found in Northwick. Butler and Robson characterised the middle-classes of Earlsdale as “solid bourgeois gentrifiers” and “alternative Croydon” types (2003a: 60). Significant numbers were employed in teaching, academic, literary, artistic and media professions and there was the over-representation of those with Arts, Humanities and Social Science degrees, which “appears once again to constitute the metropolitan habitus” (2003a: 125). However, unlike the middle-classes in Northwick, Butler and Robson found that a significant proportion had non-metropolitan origins outside of the south-east of England. As a group they also showed a greater level of social mobility (2003a: 124); in other words, many of the gentrifiers in Earlsdale came either from working-class backgrounds or from established elite upper-middle-class backgrounds. In terms of political dispositions, the ACORN typologies highlighted the over-representation, over seven times the national average, of *Guardian* readers – which points to the politically liberal orientations of this fraction of the middle-class. The small sample of middle-class parents that I interviewed reflected this characterisation and consisted of: a former stock broker turned artist and builder, his partner a social services manager; a theatrical agent and her partner a creative director in an advertising company; an architectural critic and her partner a director of communications. Compared to Northwick, the middle-class in Earlsdale represented a more variegated and compositionally complex middle-class class formation.

The attractions for the middle-classes were not as obvious in Earlsdale as in Northwick. Whilst the housing stock bordered on grandeur it was, in contrast to Northwick, a less well-known area largely hidden from the gentrification field in London: a “discrete/discreet and uncertain area of gentrification”, which had a diffuse identity, and had been somewhat of a staging post to more gentrified neighbourhoods such as Northwick (2002, para. 2.4). Butler and Robson described it as having a “frontline” atmosphere. The housing stock most attractive to gentrifiers was interspersed with “very shabby council estates” and “parts of the area ... have an appearance of random social promiscuity” (2003a: 60). There was no gentrified consumption infrastructure within the immediate neighbourhood, although there were

signs of an emerging one. Instead, the neighbourhood was largely served by a plethora of small Turkish-owned corner shops characteristic of Croxfield. Earlsdale was located close to Croxfield's main working-class retail spaces. This lack of a gentrified consumption infrastructure had profound consequences for the development of a corresponding habitus which could support middle-class experiences of "community" and place-based identity. There were no spaces in the immediate vicinity where the middle-class could spend their leisure time<sup>44</sup>; and no settings in which they could introduce and establish middle-class cultural styles and interaction rituals. Equally, without a consumption infrastructure, the working-class population could not be effectively filtered and screened away. Overall, these factors tended to render the social inequalities in the social space more visible and racially marked. The middle-class experience of the local social structure was direct and quite unromantic compared to Northwick. As one resident quoted in a newspaper article commented, "It's nice but there's still the estate, and crack users and gangs" (quoted in Cadwalladr, 2007). Unlike gentrifiers in Telegraph Hill, who were in "fear of the real South London at the bottom of the 'Hill'" but encapsulated in their hilltop enclave, the middle-class in Earlsdale appeared exposed and situationally-dominated (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 98). There were no social or symbolic shields to erase the working-class presence and the socially corrosive impact of poverty and violence which pervaded the local social structure; "there is no drawbridge and no huddling together as middle-class insiders" (Butler, 2001: 17). Public spaces in the local area were experienced as particularly menacing, dangerous and uncomfortable by the middle-class:

you have to be very wary ... this doesn't affect me so much, but a lot of my younger lodgers have had problems, the girls have been hassled, the boys hassled ... the area has a certain edge, you have to very aware of personal security.

(Informant quoted in Butler and Robson, 2003a: 178).

The interaction rituals of the working-class – hanging around near shops, fast-food outlets and off-licences etc. – forms of self-presentation, and other aspects of their cultural styles, including their blackness, were, as in Northwick, often perceived as intimidating by the middle-class. As the ethnographer Anderson, chronicler of gentrification in the black urban "ghettos" of the US, argues, although "some residents

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<sup>44</sup> There was an emerging consumption infrastructure close by, but which was not symbolically assimilated within the place-image of Earlsdale yet.



ignore or deny it, living in this shadow encourages an often exaggerated concern for security, resulting in the ultimate personal confusion of social class, colour, and gender” (1990: 138). The fear and apprehension which gentrifiers experienced was highly racialised. Whilst the majority of working-class tenants were not involved in crime, the young people, particularly black youth, “often have a hard time convincing others of this, however, because of the stigma attached to their skin colour, age, gender, appearance, and general style of self-presentation” (1990: 163). Many of the gentrifiers viewed black youth with suspicion, in terms of a “local black gang culture” (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 157). This suspicion resulted in what can be described as *avoidance coping strategies*, in contrast to the *sociable rituals* which were the mainstay of social interactions in the circumscribed public spaces like Berry Street in Northwick.

It's unpleasant to lock shutters, doors with mortice [sic] locks etc., but it is necessary ... I was mugged on the doorstep. It occasionally feels a bit heavy on the streets. This is why I began to drive, to alleviate that feeling of discomfort on the street.

(Informant quoted in Butler and Robson, 2003a: 102)

Avoidance of situated public interactions with the working-classes of the neighbourhood, whilst enabling the middle-class a measure of security, served to heighten social awareness of safety and danger and prevented the development of trust and the establishment of basic urban social bonds between the two groups. Public encounters therefore tended to reinforce and exacerbate social distance and feelings of difference: cultural styles clashed and collided.

The lack of basic urban social bonds generated dilemmas for white middle-class gentrifiers living in Earlsdale. This theme is expanded on by Anderson:

On the one hand, they know they should distrust it, and they do. But on the other hand, distrusting the area and the people who use it requires tremendous energy. To resolve this problem, they tentatively come to terms with the public areas through trial and error, using them cautiously at first and only slowly developing a measure of trust ... [residents become skilled] in the art of avoidance using their eyes, ears, and bodies to navigate safely ... one class of people is conditioned to see itself as law abiding and culturally superior while viewing the other as a socially bruised underclass inclined to criminality. This perspective creates social distance. (1990: 207)

Whilst the middle-classes found the social distance and differences of race, cultural style and habitus problematic, their marginality within the neighbourhood also held

symbolic value for some of them. The absence of a conspicuous middle-class consumption infrastructure and obvious interaction rituals of middle-class life was for many an attraction of Earlsdale; it reflected what they considered to be the “authenticity” of the neighbourhood. As one of Butler and Robson’s informants commented: “it’s not a trendified [sic] place, it still has quite a lot of character” (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 101). Thus social distance and confrontation was tempered by the symbolic mediation of middle-class identification with an idealised version of the working-class heritage of the neighbourhood, what Butler and Robson refer to as “Croxfield of the mind”.

### **5.5. *Greenvale in the gentrified imagination***

Greenvale was a large school both in size and population. It was over twice the size of Plumtree. Pupil mobility was high, reflecting the transient nature of segments of the local population and their housing situation. Significant numbers of pupils left and joined the school during the school year, and by the final year, only about a third of students would have attended Greenvale all the way through from nursery. The school intake was ethnically heterogeneous and socially mixed. Black pupils of Caribbean and African ethnicity and the white British comprised the two largest ethnic groups, with significant numbers of Turkish-speakers. It had a history of educating an ethnically-diverse predominantly working-class intake, as one teacher, a pupil in the 1970s, commented:

The make-up of the school was probably similar to what it is now, there were a lot of children from the Caribbean, a lot of children from different countries in Africa, your Turkish children, and there were your poor white trash like me.

(Erica, Greenvale-Teacher: IT19-05-05)

However, this was changing:

The community has slightly changed. Over the last four years there has been less refugees coming into the area ... you could tell wherever there was a problem in the world just by the three new kids in your class ... that hasn’t happened in the last three or four years. I think there is a bourgeoisification [sic] of the area and this school community and I put that down to the housing stock of this immediate area ... It’s predominantly white, both parents who work. So, that’s different ... They are more verbal, articulate, English-educated, to degree level, so they know how to manipulate the system to their

advantage, they have a certain expectation and attitude towards school, so they get hands on ... Slowly, year by year, there is more middle-class in the community.

(Stuart, Greenvale-Teacher: IT28-04-05)

Unlike Plumtree, the catchment area was wide, and just under half of the children resided in Earlsdale itself. The remainder were from other neighbourhoods in the borough, including several from Northwick, sometimes even further afield. The dispersal of two-thirds of the former tenants in the Carlton estate removed some of the most deprived children in the neighbourhood who had traditionally gone to Greenvale: “the horrible estate has now gone, 150 kids who lived in horrible conditions, with cockroaches, they don’t exist in this area anymore. They’ve moved on” (Stuart, Greenvale-Teacher: IT28-04-05).

The school had not always enjoyed a good reputation and, much like the area itself, its standing in recent years had improved enormously. It was a popular school with most of the resident working-class parents. A significant number of pupils had parents who similarly attended Greenvale. One Turkish-speaking mother commented:

I don’t know, our school in Croxfield is not that bad, it’s amongst the best when you compare it with others, there are others where the level is lower. When we take Croxfield area [as a whole], our school is not bad at all.

(Alev, Greenvale-Parent: FG08-06-05)

Greenvale was increasingly visible to middle-class parents in the neighbourhood and was, for the first time in its history, attracting a housing premium: “The reputation of the school is frighteningly good ... we are mentioned in estate agents’ windows now” (Owen, Greenvale-Deputy: IT25-05-05). As a newer entrant in the field of gentrification, less was known about Earlsdale and its schools, and therefore, alternative place-images circulated by commercial players within the field (e.g. estate agents) were important mediating symbols.

All three white middle-class families that I interviewed had considered private schooling before choosing Greenvale. This indicated the extent to which most were unfamiliar with the provision in Earlsdale, and Croxfield in general. They had little sense of the strategy to adopt. They appeared to be “much more willing to rely on their household resources to find individual solutions in the absence of a coherent circuit of education” (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 158).

I suppose I didn't really realise the importance of selecting a school. I just assumed that my son would go to the local school. I live next door to a teacher and she kind of warned me that the local school probably wouldn't suit him, we had to shop around as it were. Luckily, we were able to get a place here.

(Imogen, Greenvale-Parent: IT26-05-05)

Amongst these parents, contemplating private schooling was a natural part of their own classed habitus. In so doing, however, they were becoming more aware of the classed geography of London's "circuits of schooling" (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1995) which in turn informed the way that they perceived and understood the locality. It seemed to provide them with an emergent sense of class consciousness, identifications, ideological commitments and affinities within the urban order. Arabella, a prominent parent, explained:

private schools around us in London just gave me the heebie-jeebies, because they just seemed to be gilded cages really ... and I couldn't imagine having happy relationships with those sorts of parents ... I just didn't want to be in that little goldfish bowl of people with a lot of money ... When I went to private school ... a lot of the parents, they were, you know, doctors or teachers, or whatever. In a way, I just felt that the parents of the primary school I went to had more, were more similar, to those sending their kids here, than they would with, you know, lawyers, bankers, advertising folk.

(Arabella, Greenvale-Chair-of-PC: IT19-05-05)

Many of the families coming to Greenvale were increasingly attracted by carefully-crafted estate agents' images of Earlsdale, which accentuated the "whiteness" of the area; "they have this picture of a nice white middle-class school and it's not like that" (Owen, Greenvale-Deputy: IT25-05-05). There was much enthusiasm amongst middle-class prospective parents:

Lots of people around here really want to come here, and there's quite a lot of disappointment this year, from people who didn't get places, more people are trying to get in, who previously may not have tried to get in, so its reputation is definitely on the up and up. I don't understand the numbers bit, but maybe it's more *people like me* [embarrassed emphasis] [Ayo: What do you mean, "people like you"?] ... white middle-class people, chattering amongst themselves and sending their kids here.

(Arabella, Greenvale-Parent: IT19-05-05)

However, the chief attraction of Greenvale for the current middle-class parents I spoke to seemed to lie in its social, ethnic and racial diversity: "we don't want our

children just to be with just, like, the same type of people, and the great mix of people that are here, that's Greenvale's greatest asset really" (Arabella: IT19-05-05). These middle-class parents' accounts of why they chose Greenvale were expressed through the narrative of social mix:

The schools around us were mainly a lot of under-achieving children, children who didn't have English as a first language. I think he would have found that very difficult to fit in because he is quite a high achiever ... He had been at a private nursery and he wasn't going to be with any of the friends he made there because they were all going off to private schools ... so I needed to find a school where there were there were *a group of people he might recognise*, he needed to be with a good mix; of all ethnicities and all social classes really.

(Imogen, Greenvale-Parent: IT26-05-05, emphasis added)

As Imogen's extract shows, social mixing as a narrative contained many ambiguities. Having the "right" type of social and ethnic mix meant for Imogen a school in which there were not "too many" children from immigrant homes, which she associated with low achievement. In such an environment she implied that her son would not "fit in", racially, culturally and academically. So, although she wanted her child to be exposed to other cultures and acquire multicultural capital, the mix in other local schools presented a threat to his social development and the reproduction of an appropriate middle-class, white identity. These tensions resonate with Byrne's study of white middle-class women in a gentrified neighbourhood in south London who, though they "espoused multiculturalism and embraced difference, also admitted that they found a school 'too black' or perhaps, rather, not white enough" (2006: 120). Yet it seemed that choosing Greenvale, and the marginality which it entailed, for the time being, was a valued form of distinction and differentiation from other middle-class fractions. However, since few middle-class parents envisaged sending their children to Croxfield's secondary schools, and only one secondary school was considered a viable non-selective option (in Northwick), this would appear to place some limits on gentrification in Earlsdale and, indirectly, on middle-class attraction to and engagement in Greenvale. Owen the deputy explained what had been the typical middle-class form of engagement:

what tends to happen is that we get white middle-class families joining the school, because they want to be part of the community, for a couple of years, and then their kids get to a certain age and then they think, "right I've had enough of that" and move out to the country. That happens a lot, so the top

end of the school is more ethnic and working-class, and the bottom end is more white middle-class.

(Owen, Greenvale-Deputy: IT25-05-05)

The anxieties experienced by gentrifiers can be gleaned from an interview extract with Abigail. She had been a highly involved parent in Greenvale over a number of years, serving as treasurer for the Parents' Committee. Her family was now leaving for the country, partly to evade the ethical dilemmas posed for the middle-classes by schooling, in Earlsdale, and the inner-city in general:

I find living in Croxfield hard ... I will not buy a flat or pretend that I am renting a flat in Northwick in order to get him into Northwick High School, which is what everybody else does. I just won't do that! ... I don't want to be part of it ... I think it's [moving out of London] more honest than renting a flat somewhere that I am not going to live in.

(Abigail, Greenvale-Parent: IT8-06-05)

## **Conclusions**

This chapter aimed to document substantive processes of gentrification within Northwick and Earlsdale by demonstrating the contrasting social, cultural and symbolic formations of class within and between Northwick and Earlsdale as gentrified localities. In turn, it showed how these differentiated *spatial* contexts shaped the perceptions and forms of ideological engagement and constructions of Plumtree and Greenvale schools. Drawing upon the framework elaborated in chapter 2, a number of connections and articulations between neighbourhood social structures and positions, differentiated interaction rituals, cultural styles and the expressive identities of white middle-class and working-class groups were made. These have been examined in relation to a number of important themes.

First, in Northwick, I highlighted production of the locality as a middle-class haven and the formation of the gentrified habitus, pointing to the hegemonic ways in which the middle-classes have asserted their *right* to leadership and "community" over others. For them, Northwick was experienced as a symbolic, cultural and social enclave, maintained through vigorous sociable interaction rituals centred in the field of consumption. This yielded a highly emotionally-energising context for the development and expression of cultural styles and identities which communicated interpersonal solidarities and trust in the locality and its symbolisation as a "community" of "people

like us". This resulted in an *occlusion* of the working-class presence and claim to Northwick as a locality. Further, I described the centrality of the symbolism of English village life in mediating middle-class experiences and action.

I also discussed the different formations of the various urban working-class groups within Northwick: respectively the Turkish-speaking, black Caribbean and white groups. These were typical of what the urban geographer Watts terms "the post-industrial working-class", a disparate, unevenly organised grouping, united by "considerable exposure to poverty, either of the in-work or out-of-work varieties, alongside various forms of deprivation" (2008: 209). There were commonalities of social location, in the fields of employment, housing and education, as well as differences of ethnicity and race. Of note was the problematic construction of black youth, their cultural styles and interaction rituals, and its perceived links to the development of "deviant" criminal masculinities. This theme is strongly represented in Earlsdale, where the urban working-class was highly visible and racially marked. This suggests that for some gentrifiers and working-class individuals, the presence of black people, young men in particular, in public interactions came to symbolise a threat to their personal safety and sense of place and community in the urban order.

Further, the value and desirability of Plumtree as a site of class colonisation to gentrifiers (particularly amongst newer parents) appeared to rest on its assimilation into the dominant narrative of place and symbols of community. Plumtree appeared to offer the middle-class opportunities to more completely secure their place in the urban social order. However, the colonising vision was not uncontested, and there were parents who were committed to the vision of Plumtree as an urban school connected to the working-class presence.

In contrast to Northwick, there was no clear process of class formation into a gentrified habitus in Earlsdale. This was in part due to the absence of a consumption infrastructure in which middle-class interaction rituals could be established; and to a more diverse middle-class. Consequently, there appeared to be constraints on the development of strong interpersonal emotional investments and solidarities based on affinities of cultural style. Of most significance perhaps was the visible presence of racially-marked and impoverished working-class groups housed in the Carlton estate

and other social housing in the locality. I documented how the redevelopment of the estate has improved many aspects of the built environment in Earlsdale for working-class residents as well as encouraging middle-class settlement. There appeared to be reluctance, and, I claimed, an inability among gentrifiers to exert dominance over the locality and its working-class groups. This was due in part to an attachment to the notion of “authenticity”, which was attributed to an idealised notion of Earlsdale’s working-class heritage, and its imperfect embodiment in its current inhabitants. The prominence of “authenticity” as an ethical value seemed to support a sense of middle-class marginality as virtuous. As Saracino-Brown argues, gentrifiers such as these, in a sense “write themselves out of community” because they associate authentic community with locals or particular groups within the neighbourhood (2004: 461). However, the confrontational and volatile clash of opposing cultural styles and expressive identities in public interactions between middle-class and working-class groups disrupted such simplistic symbolic constructions of “authenticity”. This result was often a sharpened cultural and social divide of class and race.

It was within this context that Greenvale was beginning to emerge as a highly desirable choice of school for the middle-classes within the field of gentrification, as an “authentic” site for encountering difference, in which particular ethical dispositions could be realised (e.g. valuing of diversity). Colonisation appeared to be neither desired nor actively sought at the time of the fieldwork, although there were indications that this situation might be changing. The virtue of marginality within the wider social space was transposed into the educational arena. It was unclear precisely what Greenvale meant to the middle-classes, since they had yet to develop prominent symbols of attachment to the locality itself. This was partly because many did not stay; as Butler and Robson suggest: “there were many cases of people fleeing east to Earlsdale searching either for more space or more authenticity but who could not ‘hack’ the latter and moved on” (2003a: 191).

As I will go on to show in the following chapters, these themes of contestation resurface, albeit in different forms. The different modalities of inclusion and exclusion within each locality constrain and enable TA and teacher action. The parameters set by the contrasting manifestations of class colonisation saturate institutional processes interpolating the identities and perspectives of TAs. The social, cultural, symbolic and



ideological class topography described in this chapter provide the essential background against which the intra- and extra-school contrasts between Plumtree and Greenvale will be made. The next chapter delves into the specific habitus of TAs, and its articulation with the wider social contexts and positions outlined here, plotting their biographical histories and trajectories in relation to race, gender, ethnicity and place, and their eventual transitions into TA work.

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## Chapter 6 – Trajectories and Transitions into TA Work

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When powers are unequally distributed, the economic and social world presents itself not as a universe of possible – equally accessible to every possible subject – posts to be occupied, courses to be taken ... but rather as a signposted universe, full of injunctions and prohibitions, signs of appropriation and exclusion, obligatory routes or impassable barriers, and, in a word, profoundly differentiated. (Bourdieu, 2000: 225)

This chapter addresses the key research theme of the formation and development of TAs' habitus and orientation towards assistant work. This is done via an examination of informants' personal narratives, work trajectories and transitions into TA work. Much of the sociocultural mediation literature discussed in chapter 2 (e.g. Cable, 2004; Rueda and Monzó, 2002) has proceeded from the assumption that TAs as individuals unproblematically embody the necessary habitus and cultural styles of the predominant working-class fractions within the locality of the school, as well as having a "footing in the dominant culture, at least with regards to school practices" (Monzó and Rueda, 2001: 446). Interestingly, whilst there has been a focus in this literature on TAs' positions as cultural brokers and mediators, the structuring impact of class on assistants' own working lives has remained absent. There have been few explorations of how differences in formation, such as race, gender and career, shape and impact the development of assistants' habitus and relationship to the locality. Colley (2006) has argued that to understand why people enter certain occupations, it is important to focus on what kind of *identity* one has to *become* in order to be the "right person for the job". There is therefore a focus on the "idealised and realised dispositions" towards which individuals orientate themselves (Colley, 2006: 25). TA work means different things to different people, and the differentiated class trajectories and transitions into the role shape the approach to, and appreciation of, that role. Further, transitions into TA work are shaped not only by informants' agency and resources, but the opportunity structures present in each of the schools and the constitution of the parental field. The analysis presented here locates informants' experiences within the wider social space of the schools' neighbourhood contexts and the narrower institutional spaces of their working lives and identities.

First, I discuss the dominant working-class habitus and its feminine and masculine forms in both schools, showing the commonalities and differences amongst informants. I highlight the significance of experiences of education, locality, race, and working identities as shaping influences on trajectories and transitions into TA work. I then consider the feminine white middle-class habitus. This applies to a group whose motivations, values and orientations towards TA work have tended to be underexplored, and whose presence as TAs has not been contextualised in relation to wider class processes. These women's narratives offer an interesting contrast in this respect, and also in relation to the prevalent working-class habitus in the two schools. I conclude with a discussion of those informants whose narratives, dispositions and trajectories did not fit the dominant patterns present either in the middle-class or working-class data and who occupy more indeterminate and ambiguous positionings. For ease of reference, a table of names, and class location, habitus and ethnicity is provided below<sup>45</sup>.

*Table 5: List of TA informant names and class location*

Plumtree			Greenvale		
TAs	Class location/Habitus	Ethnicity	TAs	Class location/Habitus	Ethnicity
Amanda	Working-class	White British	Agnes	Working-class	Black British
Andre	Working-class	Black British	Faye	Working-class	Black Caribbean
Esma	Working-class	Turkish Cypriot	Gail	Working-class	White British
Hettie	Working-class	Black British	Irene	Working-class	White British
Keisha	Working-class	Black British	Justin	Working-class	Black British
Lucia	Working-class	White British	Lauren	Working-class	Black British
Lynne	Working-class	Mixed-Race	Marlon	Working-class	Black British
Nisha	Working-class	South African-Indian	Phoebe	Working-class	Black British
Paul	Working-class	Mixed-race	Tanya	Working-class	Black British
Ruth	Working-class	White British	Vicky	Working-class	White British
Sue	Working-class	White British	Yolanda	Working-class	Black British
Chloe	Middle-class	White British			
Ellie	Middle-class	White British			
Kirsten	Middle-class	White Other			
Anthea	Middle-class	White British			
Leah	Ambiguous or indeterminate	Israeli-British	Michelle	Ambiguous or indeterminate	White British
			Lillian	Ambiguous or indeterminate	White British
			Bahar	Ambiguous or indeterminate	Turkish Cypriot

<sup>45</sup> A table providing full socio-demographic profile of the TAs interviewed at Plumtree and Greenvale can be found in appendix B.

## **6.1.      *The working-class habitus***

Working-class women, and to a lesser extent men, have traditionally formed the overwhelming majority of TAs at Plumtree and Greenvale. Their formative educational and working histories and trajectories have therefore formed the dominant patterns of experiences. There were four male TAs, (Andre and Paul at Plumtree and Justin and Marlon at Greenvale) all of whom were black or of mixed black Caribbean and white ethnicities. Several of the TAs in both schools were Croxfield born and bred; at Plumtree, this included Esma, Ruth, Lucia and Sue, and at Greenvale Agnes, Yolanda, Gail, Phoebe, Justin, Vicky, Marlon and Irene. Others grew up in adjacent London boroughs (Keisha, Lynne and Paul) and, in one case, the Caribbean (Hettie). They were of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, with significant numbers from black backgrounds (see table above). In their trajectories, we see that femininity, motherhood, race, masculinity and class intersect and shape the habitus in qualitatively different ways.

### **6.1.1.      Experiences of education**

Unsurprisingly, in light of their predominantly London origins, several had attended urban primary and secondary schools. The majority recalled their experiences of schooling in negative terms, as something that was endured rather than enjoyed. Lynne recalled making a “virtue” of the “necessity” of her education in a poorly-resourced inner-city secondary school:

It wasn't a great school we went to, there were a lot of supply teachers ... we messed about, you had the disruptive behaviour in class, obviously teachers not being able to manage the behaviour; and dunno, the reputation really, went downhill, we had a change of leadership ... I suppose it wasn't very consistent staffing-wise really, the teaching wasn't great [sarcastic tone], but it's like you make the most of it.

(Lynne, Plumtree-TA: IT18-11-04)

There was a sense of cultural and normative alienation which resonated across the transcripts. For Irene, Tanya, Phoebe, Yolanda, school was an institution at odds with working-class cultural style. Irene was bullied and this was never acknowledged at the time. She also had antagonistic relations with the teachers:

I absolutely hated it [secondary school] ... I just didn't like the school, didn't like teachers, didn't like the way they spoke to me ... 'Cos you find a lot of teachers can be like "I am up here, you are down there, you'll do what I kinda say," instead of sitting there and talking to somebody as a person, they never did, they kinda looked down at you sort of thing ... If someone doesn't want to talk to you nicely, you don't want to learn ... That was me, I'm afraid! [laughs]

(Irene, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

For some of the black informants, schooling was also a highly racialised experience: low expectations from teachers and being perceived as a disciplinary problem (particularly amongst men) were issues that came up a number of times.

Racism was, kind of, still rife. Just racist attitudes which I was – I can remember being just being aware of then ... Being underestimated, I think it was, the thing that you used to get from the teacher, they underestimated you. I wasn't engaged in the lesson.

(Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

In addition, for black men, the demands of masculine peer interactions mediated their relations to schooling structures. Justin recalled how his sporting prowess raised his masculine profile amongst his peers, which in turn provoked other boys to attack him, and cemented his reputation among teachers as a "bad" boy. He thus grew up adopting a hardened masculinity.

I had a lot of people wanting to fight me because we done karate and we used to bring in our medals and show [them off] ... So a lot of fights did happen. I did get into a lot of fights.

(Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

Similarly for Andre:

It's just stuff what people used to come out with. Like on the football team: "Oh, the black kid would be good," like that. Like my name's Andre, not the black kid! I remember ... there'd be a fight and everything. "Oh, go and get Andre because all them black kids they're good at fighting". What, because I'm black?

(Andre, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

Schooling was experienced as a symbolically violent event in the formation of the habitus, which left an imprint on subsequent orientations towards education. Feelings of marginality, mediated by race, also infused black women's recollections. Tanya grew

up in the Midlands and went to a school which few of her friends attended. As she recalled, being from an ethnic minority was particularly difficult:

It was a mixture of upper-class, middle-class, lower-class. And, like I said, the cultural aspects of it, there wasn't any – you were either black or you were white, there wasn't really any in-between. There weren't very – you didn't get any, sort of, Bangladeshi children, we didn't have anything like that. So I found that – well, I mean, that's all I knew ... I found it difficult in school.

(Tanya, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05)

The exception to this general pattern was Lauren. Lauren grew up outside London in Essex, and was the only working-class TA to describe her schooling in wholly positive terms:

I had quite a nice time, I didn't have any problems at school and I did quite well at school. Some children hated school and it was the worst time, but I quite enjoyed school.

(Lauren, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

Lauren's parents, first-generation Caribbean immigrants, provided support and encouragement for her education and, it would appear, had high hopes for her, which implied an upwardly-mobile trajectory:

You know when you've got black parents, and they are always on about getting your education, do this, do that. If I had said to them I wanted to be a hairdresser they would have been completely mad at me.

(Lauren, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

Several informants reported having supportive parents who had high aspirations for them, but often lacked the resources to be involved in their education. As Agnes, the child of first-generation Caribbean immigrants, described:

my dad didn't have any formal qualification but he taught himself how to read and write ... He made himself. And then that in turn made him make us focus in on our education and how important it actually was, because he didn't have any, you know.

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

Overall, most of my informants did not experience educationally-successful careers and for many further study and/or specific career aspirations quickly gave way to the pressing material need to earn a living to contribute to their households or gain independence from their parents. As I discuss below, working lives were interwoven

with spells of re-entry into education or training, periods of unemployment, and motherhood at relatively earlier ages in comparison to the middle-class informants.

### **6.1.2. Working lives: “making out” and “getting by”**

In his extensive study of households in Kilcardy, Scotland, McCrone (1994: 99) identified two patterns of experiences and orientation towards the future which he referred to as “making out” and “getting by”. Making out “involves taking a longer-term perspective, taking decisions in the short-term which have deliberate long-term implications, marking off, as it were, milestones of progress” (1994: 69). In contrast, “getting by” is “about coping in the short-term, say on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis”, reflecting diminished social and cultural resources and sense of agency (1994: 69). This rough typology is useful for thinking about the differences in the habitus of informants as it developed in relation to their experiences and employment trajectories. In one group were individuals such as Agnes, Ruth, Hettie, Amanda, Marlon, Justin, Paul, Andre and Lynne, who had managed relatively successful transitions, either directly from schooling into further education or into work. They had managed to mobilise their resources, informal forms of capital and vocational credentials to generate relatively stable occupational lives. Many of them had been able to realise a *congruency* between their formative habitus, credentials, experiences and the dispositions activated by their working environment. Amongst the women who attended college, there was a tendency towards vocationally-orientated courses (e.g. secretarial, hairdressing, childcare courses). These forms of vocational training enabled them to utilise what Skeggs (1997) refers to as “feminine cultural capital” gained within the home or informal settings. Skeggs’s work has suggested that adopting conventional femininity through, for example, undertaking care courses, can offer working-class women the chance of “respectability” and is therefore highly attractive. Furthermore, it is likely that possession of this form of capital can reinforce women’s tendency to seek work in predominantly female service sectors of employment. As Huppatz (2009: 53) argues, femaleness and stereotypical femininity may be perceived and experienced as an advantage in particular employment contexts: “this advantage occurs because caring is aligned with the female body and the female body is aligned with femininity”.

These experiences are typified by Agnes. After school, Agnes went straight into work as a hairdresser. These occupational experiences built-on and extended the informal feminine cultural capital acquired in the household, where she used to do her friends' and siblings' hair: "And, back in the day, you didn't really need to be qualified to work in a shop, you just had to have experience" (Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05). However, Agnes soon recognised that a qualification would facilitate her potential career and prospects, so she "left work in a shop to go to college". The experience of doing the vocational qualification itself generated new orientations and reflexivity towards her working life and opportunity structures, which resulted in a modified set of aspirations and motivations.

So once I done that, that's when I thought, "well, you know what, I don't really want to hit the glass ceiling," which is what hair stylists have, which is they get their own shop and that's where they stay. And I thought, "I want to get into a bit more doing the [hair for] magazines and photo-shoots."

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

Using family connections and her contacts in the black hairstyling sector, Agnes was able to achieve a career as a freelancer. Others such as Tanya appeared to have managed similar stability in their working lives, in her case in the secretarial field:

I've been a secretary for, basically, all my life from, sort of, college onwards. In between having my children I'd always have part time work and I've tended to stick to office work because it's what I knew.

(Tanya, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05)

Thus, we see amongst several of the women in this group the ways in which formative dispositions were activated and deployed as capital, which in turn reinforced and structured those very orientations, skills and predispositions. In their case, towards what would be considered stereotypical feminine skills of care. This congruency between dispositions and positions in the social space was more pronounced amongst the male working-class informants – Marlon, Justin, Andre and Paul. Their working lives were founded on their earlier formative experiences, embodied cultural capital and social networks acquired in alternative, voluntary contexts. For Justin, his involvement in the Caribbean Carnival Arts movement in Croxfield nurtured his own creative skills and knowledge; Paul's voluntary work was linked to religion; Andre's was through sports and coaching; and for Marlon, it was an extended involvement in a



local youth club on his estate, which he had attended himself. He explained his trajectory and engagement and its mutually-reinforcing relationship:

I went to the club when I was about ten. And then when you got to 16, 'cos it's a voluntary organisation, you became junior staff ... and you gradually just sort of progress. Then they start sending you onto courses and so I just went on courses and all stuff like that. So that's how I ... got into it [working with children].

(Marlon, Greenvale-LM: IT16-03-05)

These dispositions and schemas, based on their alternative forms of cultural capital, as youth/play workers in various informal non-mainstream settings, were activated and mobilised within the field of employment. Social ties and other resources acquired within the voluntary sector were also key in supporting their transitions into and within employment:

'Cos the person who runs the learning mentors programme in Croxfield, he's another person who works at the same youth club as me. So ... there's quite a pool of us who used to work in that youth club, who've ended up going into mentoring as well.

(Marlon, Greenvale-LM: IT16-03-05)

Overall, individuals in this group appeared to be “making out”. However, this “stability” should be viewed in light of often unsettled intersecting housing trajectories. The overwhelming majority lived in social housing and, as previously touched upon, the allocation of good quality accommodation within Croxfield was scarce, with waiting times counted in years. At the same time, being a tenant placed them within a marginal position in the wider social space, increasing their exposure to additional forms of disadvantage (i.e. crime, health problems etc.).

The second group of working-class informants – Keisha, Irene, Lauren, Yolanda, Phoebe, Esma, Vicky – in contrast, appeared to be “getting by” in their narratives. They had problematic transitions and held more precarious positions in the labour market. Subjective orientations seemed *misaligned* to the objective probabilities within the occupational and educational fields. For some, career aspirations were undefined or unclear, and did not always articulate with credentials or wider experiences. Work did not appear to elicit predispositions or hold any satisfaction. The working lives of these women were fragmented and their trajectories narrated as a succession of “jobs” with limited openings for self-expression. This group inhabited a much more constricted

social universe, in which employment appeared to provide little or no opportunity for agency in the social world. These women – and they were all women – occupied relatively marginalised positions in predominantly localised labour markets:

When I left school, I went on youth training scheme and I did a [childcare course], to do with nursery and stuff. I did that for two years, then I left that, and I never kind of find anything that I really, really, wanted to do. So, I've had this job, that job, this job.

(Irene, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

After I left school ... I done different things [at college], IT, retail, health and social care ... but I left it half way because I didn't like it.

(Keisha, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04)

Lauren attempted A-levels, intending to follow a professional trajectory into social work, encouraged by her parents. However, a particularly negative work experience placement in a social services office left her deflated and disorientated. Her sense of control and power over her working life, and the opportunities to achieve social mobility, subsequently therefore seemed diminished:

so I thought "that is not for me" so I left that course and went on an admin course, and then I ended up in Tower Records and [then] a travel agency, so my career has went off on a tangent. Just went like all over the place really.

(Lauren, Greenvale-TA: IT4-03-05)

Similarly, for Yolanda, what began as a smooth transition into secretarial work from college yielded to work that she did not enjoy as much: "I did secretarial courses at college. Everybody wanted to be a secretary then [laughs] ... worked as a secretary for about 3 years, yeah. And then, worked in a television shop, renting tellies" (Yolanda, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05). Bourdieu makes the point that "capital in its various forms is a set of pre-emptive rights over the future" (Bourdieu, 2000: 225), and for some informants, they did not have the resources to establish a claim over their future.

### **6.1.3. Motherhood**

Motherhood had a significant structuring impact on many female informants' lives. Mothering confronted these women with a range of difficult decisions in relation to their working lives: how to balance their domestic responsibilities and childcare with

the need to support or contribute financially to their households. Vincent *et al.* argue that working-class mothers in particular experience pressures which stem from their social location:

[They] are vulnerable to criticism whether they engage in paid work or not. If they stay at home, they are mostly on benefits, dependent, not economically productive, and therefore not “good” citizens. ... If mothers worked, given that they were in jobs that provided them with little in the way of flexibility and autonomy ... they were open to charges of not spending enough time with their children. (2010: 135)

Managing these demands, across various social fields, was a constant source of tension and generated a change in these women’s orientation to their working lives, what Skeggs (2004b: 139) refers to as their “plausibility structure”; in effect what was un/desirable and im/possible. It led a number to what were critical moments of gendered reflexivity towards their life trajectories and perceived opportunity structures. Amongst those with established or secure employment, this tended to generate demands for more flexible modes of working or a decisive career break. For Gail, this precipitated a shift towards seeking flexible and geographically-near forms of employment compatible with mothering.

The hours are ridiculous in a doctor’s surgery. I’d work daytimes, then you’d come home, and then I’d work evening ones as well. You can’t do that when you’ve got a little baby. So, I thought I’d get a job in a school.

(Gail, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

For Hettie, a lone parent and hairdresser, there was a conscious decision to find work that was more compatible with her mothering:

You gotta try and find quality time with your children, and I didn’t have any to be quite honest ... and I decide I am going to change careers, but what can I do that can fit in with him, that I would enjoy?

(Hettie, Plumtree-TA: IT20-09-05)

This prompted Hettie to consider TA work because she recalled that she had enjoyed the *ad hoc* volunteering she had done at her son’s school when he was younger. She was thus able to generate and mobilise a vision of an alternative pathway.

Esma worked at home as a machinist in Croxfield’s Turkish-controlled garment and clothing industry.

I was making trousers at home. I was a machinist. I never wanted ... to go and get a full-time job outside of the home with ... two small children. It just wouldn't have been practical.

(Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-10-04)

Amongst those with a weaker position in the labour market, mothering was often narrated as highly constraining, as “stuck with being a mother” (Reay, 1998: 43), particularly amongst those who were/had been lone parents (Irene, Lucia, Phoebe). With fewer resources, motherhood appeared to entrench their sense of seclusion within an impoverished domestic sphere, with restricted social ties: “I felt very isolated, I took my children to school, did my shopping and come home, and that was it, until I picked them up” (Irene, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05). Similar experiences were reported by some working-class mothers in Vincent *et al.*'s study, as this extract from one of their informants shows. Describing her first year as a mother:

It was boring, there was nothing to do, nothing to do, nobody to talk to. I got hardly any visitors. It was boring and lonely because obviously I'm a single mum so there's no one to lean on. So it was hard [...] I didn't really go out, I just went out to do my shopping, do my laundry and that was it. (Charlie, mixed race, young lone mother, at home, Battersea)

(Informant quoted in Vincent, Ball and Braun, 2010: 131)

For Yolanda, motherhood dislodged her grasp on the employment field: “Left from there [the television rental shop], had the kids, and then did nothing for a while until I walked back in here [Greenvale]” (Yolanda, Greenvale-TA: IT18-3-05). Although few of the mothers made an active decision to seek TA work, the demands and temporal structures of caring (particularly when their young child/ren began school) generated a felt tension that many sought to resolve by looking for employment that would facilitate their role as mothers. In addition, mothering had transformed these women's dispositions in relation to care, and introduced new interests and motivations.

It's like you have a child, and you are thrown into being a parent, there's no handbook ... Having a child changes everything, so that's why I went this way.

(Lauren, Greenvale-TA: IT4-03-05)

The image of primary schooling itself as a form of mothering and nurturing resonated with these women's activated dispositions (Nias, 1999; Vogt, 2002). Unlike those without children, motherhood had transformed the plausibility structures for most of the working-class women (in common with the middle-class whom I discuss below)

shaping their trajectories in TA work, influencing their attachment to their worker identities; their engagement in the parental field; and the public identities they could claim and enact as mothers. Precisely how mothers' (and other working-class informants') transformed habitus and identities articulated with schooling to produce these specific trajectories and transitions into TA work is detailed in the sections below.

#### **6.1.4. Transitions into Plumtree and Greenvale: worker identities**

As discussed above, most informants did not consciously pursue or embark on careers in TA work<sup>46</sup>. How then did informants make the transition into Plumtree and Greenvale? There were, two discernible patterns of experience and orientations, albeit with exceptions, in the way TAs made the transition. What distinguished the informants in the two groups was the emphasis on their identity and position through which their transitions were enacted. There were several – Andre, Hettie, Phoebe, Justin, Keisha, Paul, Andre, Ruth, Sue, Faye – who made the transition into Plumtree or Greenvale as *workers*. What distinguished these individuals in the worker group were their perceptions and practical understanding of TA work as *work* first and foremost. In most cases, informants had moved into TA work previously in another school, or made the transition whilst employed in a different job or whilst unemployed. A number had made the transitions into TA work before working at either Plumtree or Greenvale (e.g. Ruth, Hettie, Gail, Phoebe). For these individuals, it was largely experienced as a *shift* within already pre-existing work trajectories. The move towards TA work was narrated as one of external propulsion in an unfolding “world of already realised ends” (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53):

It wasn't a thing where I said, “I am going to make it a choice,” my agency just said to me I've got so much experience with children would I like to go into the schools and work in schools for a while, and that's how I suggested I'll give it a go, and that's where I am now.

(Phoebe, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

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<sup>46</sup>The main exception to this is Lynne who had trained as nursery nurse, and held the position at Plumtree. As I pointed out in footnote 2, the nursery nurse role, whilst encompassed in the definition of TA used within this thesis, was a much older and established support staff role with an associated training pathway and qualification.

A few made the transition whilst on benefits or experiencing involuntary unemployment.

So, I was in a stage in my life when I realised that I weren't really doing nothing. What do I really want to do? And I decide I want to work with kids but it started off being in after school clubs.

(Keisha, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04)

It was a period when I wasn't doing nothing. And I said, "Well, I've got my lunchtimes free, there's no reason why I can't go into my old school and apply for it [mid-day supervisor]." I was actually looking at applying for a school governor's post and I was looking at learning mentor positions ... so that's what I was looking at, at the time. So when I was told that there was a post here I thought "I've got my lunchtimes free".

(Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

Amongst some informants who made this shift as workers, the continuity in respect of occupational habitus was experienced as a congruent meshing of active dispositions and subjective alignment with objective properties of the field. This was particularly true of male informants, who most embodied a vocational habitus towards assistant work as reflected in their trajectories:

To be honest I mean like I always worked with kids at – like I was always told like, "It's something you're good at doing" ... So it was just kind of – a natural progression from what I was doing [at the youth club] and leading into this.

(Marlon, Greenvale-LM: IT16-03-05)

For Sue, the shift came near the end of her working life when she lost her job as a machinist:

All the small factories were shutting down ... and moving abroad ... I think it was a good chance for me, I mean I was upset at the time when it stopped, I thought, "where I am going to now at my age?" I thought there's nothing out there for me.

(Sue, Plumtree-TA: IT19-01-05)

Sue was helped to make this shift in her working life by her daughter, who was working as a LSA in a local school. She initially gained a meals supervisor post in another Croxfield school and then moved to Plumtree. At Plumtree, she was encouraged by the then head Meredith to develop voluntary experience working with an autistic child. This led to new training and learning opportunities and eventually resulted in the offer of an additional job as a TA. Starting as a meals supervisor was a

common element in many working-class women's initial transitions into TA posts. Another informant who had made this type of transition commented: "I suppose I didn't intend on being a teaching assistant, you come to do one job, and you slip into other jobs" (Lauren, Greenvale-TA: IT4-03-05). Similarly, having worked in playcentres, Keisha made the transition into Plumtree as a midday supervisor, then worked in the breakfast club, until a vacancy as a TA became available, which she applied for.

In contrast to these transitions, were those made by *parents* (of pupils attending the school) which are discussed the next section. The positions and identities of *parents* reflect a different set of practices and orientations, and highlight more explicitly the shaping (and contrasting) influence of schools – particularly heads – in determining the conditions of individuals' transitions into TA work.

#### **6.1.5. Transitions into Plumtree and Greenvale: parent identities**

Transitions for working-class parents evidenced relatively similar patterns in both Greenvale and Plumtree, which contrast to those of middle-class parents. TAs negotiated their way into assistant work in relation to their position in the parental field and the particular enactment of headship operative at the time<sup>47</sup>. There appeared to be opportunities for active parental involvement at Plumtree and it was within this context that Esma, Lucia, Amanda, had made their transition to TA work as parents. However, their trajectories did not intersect with those of middle-class mothers who also made transitions as parents. In contrast to them, their engagement with their children's schooling was uncertain and diffident, and framed by modest household resources.

For example, Lucia had been employed as an assistant in a local off-licence near the school when she was encouraged to volunteer by the then head Meredith. This opportunity proved an antidote to repetitive shop work: "I just thought it would be nice to do something different from standing there all day wrapping bottles up" (Lucia, Plumtree-TA: IT19-05-04). Volunteering provided a glimpse of a different kind of working environment. Esma and Lucia's involvement at Plumtree was circumscribed

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<sup>47</sup> The parental field and its transformation at Plumtree will be discussed in greater detail in §6.2.3.

and there was not any desire to take up a formal position within the parental sphere (e.g. member of the Parents' Committee). In any case, these women did not have confidence in their skills, education and other resources that could be mobilised and recognised as capital within the parental field. Thus volunteering in the school was perceived as a tentative development of interpersonal relationships with particular teachers in support of their children's learning, as Esma described:

I think it all started when my son, who's now fifteen, was in year 2. I used to come in and do voluntary work, two afternoons ... a week. One afternoon was on the computer ... and [one] afternoon was paired reading where I'd read with children. This went on for about a year ... And then there was an ... LSA job. And the head ... suggested that I go for it. And I was like, "Oh no, no, no. I haven't got the experience, I haven't got the qualifications, I don't know anything." But she really pushed me towards it. I went for the interview, got the job.

(Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-10-04)

As Esma's reaction illustrates, the offer of a job was not only surprising, she felt it was improbable, not something someone like her could do. Her own schooling experiences had instilled feelings of worthlessness and spoiled identity in relation to learning (Goffman, 1963/1990). As Bourdieu reminds us:

[The] early experiences have particular weight because the habitus tends to ensure its own constancy and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information. (1990, pp. 60-61)

For these women, then, embarking on TA work was narrated as a *transformative* and uncertain occupational and biographical journey, which had unexpectedly presented itself.

It was actually 'cos of circumstances in the other job, that my boss like sold the off-licence, and what have you, and this job came up here, and they just said ... was I interested in it, and I just thought, "yeah, why not?" 'Cos I enjoyed doing the two hours [of volunteering], I thought, "yeah, why not?"

(Lucia, Plumtree-TA: IT19-05-04)

At Greenvale, there were also opportunities for involvement in the parental field as volunteers. However, these did not seem as established or institutionalised in the same way as at Plumtree. For most of the mothers, transitions from the parental field into the school were more idiosyncratic and less patterned than at Plumtree, reflecting the



general opacity of social relations between parents and the school. The influence of heads was again vital. This is highlighted in Tanya's case:

My daughter used to come to the school, and I came in regarding an incident with herself and another child, and ended up with a job ... [It was the] first time I'd actually spoken to [Bev] on a one-on-one ... it just transpired that they needed somebody to work with this particular child ... I'd just been made redundant not too long ago, so I was in-between jobs ... So I thought I'd come and give it a trial. And it was supposed to be for, I think it was between two and six weeks ... and then I've been here ever since.

(Tanya, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05)

It was clear that amongst those who made the transition as parents, the school was a key influence in shaping their orientations and providing opportunities to become involved. Agnes, then a freelance hairstylist, began to volunteer, accompanying her child's class on school trips and other *ad hoc* activities. As a result of a member of support staff falling ill, Agnes was asked to volunteer for a week as a classroom assistant, during which period the idea of working as a TA crystallised for her:

I thought to myself, "You know what, these hours are quite short and they're good because I can manage to be with the kids, and have a short day, and ..." So I just asked [the teacher] what's the best procedure, and she said, "Talk to Bev," so I went to talk to Bev.

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

For all working-class parents in Plumtree and Greenvale, transitions were a *contingent* process motivated by practical and financial considerations as well as the resonances between their habitus and the school. It was seen as a particularly good way of balancing the demands of work and home life. The temporal organisation of TA work was perceived as compatible with the temporal constraints of mothering, which was a feature of all mothers' narratives, irrespective of class. TA work was flexible and, in contrast to other forms of paid employment, temporally *aligned* to the school day. In Agnes' case:

It could have been any school, really, it didn't have to be in the same school [where her children attended]. But just the fact that they are here and I was working [voluntarily] here and they did need help, it, sort of, all amalgamated together and just became the right decision to make, yeah.

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

Gail started work as a TA in another school in Croxfield until:

an opening came up over here, and I came here [to Greenvale]. It was nearer, and I used to go here [as a pupil] ... and I thought it would be nice to work here as well, and that, so I made the change. I done a lot of voluntary ... and in the end I was there, all day every day anyway, doing voluntary ... 'cos my son was over there by then.

(Gail, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

In these working-class mothers' narratives we see the meshing of classed opportunity structures and subjective orientations, and as Agnes put it, how making the transition into TA work became the "right decision to make": what in Bourdieusian terms is the fit between the habitus and the position-takings available in a field.

### **6.1.6. Work and belonging**

The theme of *belonging* in relation to taking up assistant work was present in the transcripts of several working-class informants, particularly those born and bred in Croxfield – Gail, Justin, Esma, Lucia, and Agnes. The prospect of working at Plumtree/Greenvale reflected a sense of place in the urban order.

I just applied for the job and it turned out that a lot of people here knew me already ... So it just seemed natural for me to come here, really.

(Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

As Bourdieu explained, the habitus is in its most reproductive mode when it is in synchrony with its spatial surroundings or *place*: because "he [sic] feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus" (Bourdieu, 2000: 143). For these individuals the congruency between place-based identity and habitus was apparent.

Born in Croxfield, stayed here, gonna die here I suppose [laughs]. So I know a lot of the people, like even some of the children, their parents, I used to rave with them ... I know the layout, I know what the street talk is and I know what's happening.

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

And:

I was brought up in a road around the corner, now I just live around that corner [laughs] ... They all know me from around here and that.

(Gail, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

Being from Croxfield was an unquestioned aspect of their lives and identities. Their relative immobility anchored these men and women to the locality and their culturally-embedded understanding of it. There was a familiarity with the spatial and social organisation of the neighbourhood, its lived history and knowledge of the personalities and institutions that have shaped working-class life. Informants like Gail and Agnes embodied the alternative working-class forms of cultural style and expressive repertoires of the neighbourhood. There was therefore no social distance implied in their relation and identification with Croxfield.

As several ethnographies of the various working-class groups in London show, place and class identity are intimately linked (e.g. Back, 1996; Evans, 2007). There is a long history of territorialism, rooted in the idea of the prestige and (sometimes defensive) pride in one's "manor" (e.g. estate). It was quite clear that, for some of my informants, "becoming a working-class person is a lot to do with learning how to become a particular kind of person by learning how to belong to a particular place" (Evans, 2007: 158). Particularly for male TAs, the prospect of working in a school was part of their identification with a wider imagined urban working-class community and an enactment of a civic impulse and thus a transformation of the habitus and the structures of which it was a part: "I know that is my strength, giving back to the youth in the community" (Andre, Plumtree-TA: IT22-6-05). Similarly for Justin:

I know a lot of people around here [in Earlsdale]. My uncle lives here, my auntie lives there [pointing]. And I used to teach steel pans<sup>48</sup>, so a lot of the kids that used to go there, [their] younger brothers I kind of know. I do know a lot of people around this area. Yeah, I guess I am part of the community ... I know a lot of people from, like, the youth sector in Croxfield. So, yeah, I guess I am a community person.

(Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

Esma had been a former pupil at Plumtree and her siblings had also attended Plumtree, as well as her own children. The school therefore held deep psycho-social resonances, woven into her individual biography and wider intergenerational ties to the locality: "I have been around the school for a long, long time ... We've got a lot of history" (Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-10-04). Again, we see the ways in the habitus recasts the past into the present. Greenvale and Plumtree, for a number of TAs, were a part of

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<sup>48</sup> Musical instrument originating from Trinidad and Tobago.

the habitus and an important and structuring presence in their lives. Whilst this sense of place can be read as being indicative of the reproductive character of the local habitus, they can also be seen as highlighting its transformative aspects.

## **6.2. *Feminine middle-class habitus***

There were a number of middle-class informants at Plumtree whose trajectories and location within the local social structure strongly converged with those of the wider gentrified habitus. There were no middle-class assistants at Greenvale who fitted this pattern<sup>49</sup>. This is revealing of differences by which class colonisation played out in each of the two schools and, as I discuss in the next chapter, the shaping influence of headship. Chloe, Anthea, Ellie and Kirsten all had children at Plumtree and lived within the small catchment area of the school, in owner-occupied housing, on roads with significant numbers of other white middle-class parents with children at Plumtree. In terms of geographical origins, Chloe was born and bred in Oxfordshire, Ellie was from the north-east of England, Kirsten was Australian but grew up and was educated in South Africa, and Anthea was from the south-east of England. Despite these differences, they all appeared to have had broadly similar class backgrounds and relatively secure social trajectories.

Schooling was generally fondly and positively remembered. In two cases it was relatively privileged, with Kirsten and Chloe both spending periods in private schools: “I was in the middle of the bush basically, I had a great schooling, it was wonderful, I was in boarding school for a couple of years as well” (Kirsten, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04). Anthea, Ellie, and Kirsten all had successful school careers; Anthea finished with tertiary-level vocational qualifications, Kirsten matriculated (equivalent to A-level) from her private boarding school in South Africa and Ellie attended university after sixth-form. Chloe’s experiences, however, were somewhat different. She was moved from a state primary into a private preparatory school and then onto private secondary school. This was a source of tension in her family as all her friends from the state primary she attended had gone to the local comprehensive. Feelings of being set apart by her family’s class position generated ambivalence towards her privileged background, which still infused the habitus:

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<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting that there were no middle-class male TAs in either school.

I went to private secondary school, till O-levels, which was a very good school. Hated it at the time, in that I quite liked it, I didn't bunk off too much, you know, I was there but I was a bit rebellious ... and then I went to sixth form, over the road at the comprehensive school, because then I was getting a bit annoyed with [the private] school and I don't think I'd have lasted [in the] sixth form if I'd stayed at the posh school. So I went over to the comprehensive school where all my friends were.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Rebellion for Chloe meant disturbing familial expectations and choosing a sixth-form in the local comprehensive, and also delaying what for her seemed the inevitability of university by taking "a couple of years off" before embarking on a degree at a prestigious university. Chloe's household stocks of capital enabled dissonant experiences and perturbations in her transitions to be managed and accommodated within the structures of common-sense of her class position. Her narrative thus highlights the kind of formative experiences which inflect the political liberalism of the gentrified habitus in Northwick. Overall, as a result of their own successful experiences, these women developed a positive orientation towards formal education – in contrast to working-class informants whose experiences of education tended to be negative and infused with a sense of "failure" – and institutional cultural capital in the form of qualifications which could be realised in the labour market.

### **6.2.1. Working lives**

Movement and transposition of the habitus into the field of employment was for the most part unproblematic. Ellie, Kirsten and Anthea all secured employment in well-paid professional jobs in London. Ellie had been a researcher for an international charity, Kirsten an office manager for the NHS, and Anthea worked in the City of London as a desktop publisher for an international bank. Their careers up to the point of motherhood exhibited stability and vertical progression, coupled with growing affluence as they formed dual-income owner-occupied households with their partners within Northwick. Chloe did not have a conventional transition to work, and this is discussed below. Working in a professional milieu provided Ellie, Anthea and Kirsten with opportunities for acquiring organisationally-valued forms of capital – e.g. skills, competences relating to their specific jobs – as well as more subtle embodied capitals – confidence, poise – that were incorporated into their cultural styles and expressive

repertoires: “I used to be a shop steward ... In my old job I felt quite confident to speak out on behalf of individuals or as a whole group or in large meetings” (Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05).

Pursuing full-time careers allowed these women to depart from traditional notions of femininity where women are dependent on others (mainly men), as they rose steadily within the authority hierarchy of organisations in which they worked. In terms of their position in regards to order-giving and taking, Anthea was most clearly in a position of authority as a manager of other people’s work activity. She however found the frontstage persona of power somewhat alienating: “I really didn’t enjoy my job that much” (Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04). Anthea and Ellie both worked in large, structured organisations where they frequently gave and took orders, and also enjoyed a great deal of autonomy and opportunities to develop positive orientations to organisational hierarchy:

So I did a totally different job, quite stressful, quite high-powered, lots of interviewing, lots of office work, lots of very pressurised, urgent work; travelling; interviewing people. It was a fantastic job.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT20-10-04)

And:

I had a job that I really enjoyed ... and I’d been in the City [of London] for like 15 years.

(Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT12-04-04)

Unlike the other women, Chloe did not enter the labour market after university; instead she went to live in Cape Town with her partner for a few years and undertook further post-graduate study. The ability to defer entry into world of work was indicative of her class position; as Bourdieu noted, “economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm’s length” (1984: 55). Chloe did not appear to have had any concrete career aspirations and her trajectory remained largely insulated from the demands of earning a living. Pregnancy prompted a return to England and a move to London so her partner could pursue his career. It was here that the lives of these four women intersected as they became mothers, and the habitus was shaped by new dispositions and orientations.

### **6.2.2. Work and mothering**

Motherhood for Ellie, Kirsten and Anthea marked the start of a slow but decisive shift in their occupational and social trajectories, which generated a critical reflexivity in relation to gender and work. Initially, having their first child did not destabilise their commitment to career. The shift from full-time paid employment to full-time mothering was a protracted process, influenced partly by factors relating to work and to do with the economic and social resources available within their household. Following the birth of her first child, Anthea returned to work full-time, and the family employed a nanny. With the arrival of her second child, she returned to work on a part-time basis. Increasing dissatisfaction with aspects of her working life, and increased time at home taking on domestic and caring responsibilities, led to the nanny's hours being reduced.

The bank that I was working for was taken over by a big American bank, and the whole actual nature of the job changed ... A lot of the people changed – the management was not ... what we'd sort of been used to before, and ... I was doing three days a week, so I wasn't full-time, and I just thought, you know, enough's enough.

(Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT12-05-04)

Anthea left her job to become a full-time mother and was financially supported by her partner. With Kirsten, there was a similar pattern and the birth of her second child prompted a decisive reorientation towards full-time mothering in preference to paid employment she did not enjoy: "when you have children your priorities change" (Kirsten, Plumtree: IT8-10-04). In Ellie's case, her second child, in concert with the decision to prioritise her partner's career, resulted in a temporary relocation to Australia which put a decisive strain on her career, pressuring her to resign and become a full-time mother. For these women this represented a momentous shift, not only in their working lives, but in their orientations towards femininity and the renegotiation of the division of labour within their households. In Chloe's case, motherhood, work and moving to Northwick all coincided, and provided a highly socialising context for the habitus:

I just thought, oh, I'm moving to this great anonymous city with a little baby, and I was quite anxious. And then we just found, I couldn't believe it, it's like a village, it's like you're living in a tiny hamlet ... And everyone is so friendly.

Everyone's got children on our street, you know, everyone has got at least two kids under the age of ten.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Chloe's partner's mother (who had also moved to the area) was an editor and this provided her with an opportunity to utilise the embodied cultural capital of the habitus to achieve a part-time home-based freelance career as an editor/proofreader. This lasted a number of years until the mother left the area. Without the social support, Chloe found she did not have the motivational disposition for freelance work:

Yeah, and it was desperately miserable ... Freelance is just, you know, it's loads and there's nothing and then there's loads. And when I had nothing it was just awful.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Feelings of marginalisation were refracted through the gendered division of labour and caring responsibility with her partner. It was also mediated by the fact she had never experienced the financial independence which full-time work could facilitate, and she was aware of this dissonance between her own experiences and the wider expectations governing the construction of middle-class femininity:

I had my partner on my back saying, [changes to scornful tone] "Oh, what do you do, sit around and watch daytime telly all day? You lazy cow," and all that sort of thing. It wasn't very good for your head to not be doing anything.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Mothering for these four women therefore represented a new context in which status, identities and roles had to be reconfigured, new skills and dispositions acquired and activated. None of these women had deep roots within Northwick and thus their mothering was taking place in a different context from what they had grown up with, and it involved new negotiations of place. The start of formal schooling for their eldest child presented all four women with an opportunity to re-engage in the civic sphere and, in Chloe's case, escape the domestic marginalisation that she had begun to experience. Their parental identities and involvements in relation to the school propelled them towards Plumtree and TA work.



### 6.2.3. Interpolations in the parental field

Involvement in their children's schooling and cognitive enhancement appeared to be a rich vein of agency, motivation and expressive identity – in contrast to the diminished agency and social isolation many of the working-class mothers experienced. Contact with Plumtree facilitated access to established social networks and participation in highly socialising interaction rituals with other middle-class mothers, generating a valuable performative context for identity formation and re-socialisation of the habitus. Interaction rituals in the parental field began to transform their sense of Northwick as a locality, as Ellie told me: “I mean, before I had children I didn't even know my next door neighbours in Northwick” (Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-6-05). Ellie, Chloe, Kirsten and Anthea soon became enthusiastic volunteers, assisting teachers on a regular basis. Voluntary work in the classroom resulted in an unexpected pleasure from working with children and the activation of caring skills and dispositions: “So I started doing ... one morning a week. So I'd just go in, and she [the teacher] would sort of tell me what they'd got set for the day, and that was sort of how I got into it” (Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT12-05-04).

These high levels of maternal involvement in schooling were indicative of the interpolation of the middle-class habitus into the parental field; doing what came “naturally” (Reay, 1998). They were recognisable figures in the playground and in the school. Through their voluntary work at the school, these women were able to develop social capital, establishing ties with other prominent parents and governors, as well as teachers. This further reified their mothering identities.

Self-presentation offers women with children the opportunity to appear as the mothers they would like to be, the ideal toward which they aspire. Impression management also gives mothers an opportunity to demonstrate role embracement – to declare attachment to the role, to demonstrate the qualities and capacity they have for performing it, and to be actively engaged or involved in appropriate role activities. (Collett, 2005: 330)

This can be contrasted with working-class mothers, for whom parental volunteering and other forms of engagement within the parental field were not part of the class habitus. As other research highlights, the middle-classes are generally more disposed and better resourced for engagement in the civic sphere (Vincent, 2000). Unlike working-class mothers, like Agnes, Lucia, Esma, there was an investment in “the game”,

a desire to take up a formal position within the parental sphere. Quite quickly they came to occupy powerful positions within the parental field, in particular the Parents' Committee. The committee was a socialising forum within the parental field, providing a potent mediation of parental voice. It was a somewhat hybrid organisation which raised funds for the school and had established itself as the legitimated (in relation to the school), but contested (in relation to other parents), collective voice of parents within the parental field. It was a space which appeared to have institutionalised the cultural style and capital of the dominant white middle-class parents in its interaction rituals. As one of the co-chairs told me, the social side was important: "we have evening meetings at each other's houses, again to emphasise the social aspect and I see [the committee] not primarily as a fundraiser" (Ursula, Plumtree-Parent: IT4-03-05). A number of parents were critical of the exclusive character of the committee. One black parent explained:

I tend to see [the committee] as white middle-class women getting together, who've got time to spend, and drink tea, talking about the minutiae of what is happening ... I see some of the mothers, and I think [pause] no [shakes head]. Don't want to get involved. I feel if it was half and half I would have made more of a concerted effort to be involved, but there's no kind of invitation to make it more inclusive to non-white parents, I question their motives ... In that if you've got a club that is not inclusive to all parents, then what's that saying?

(Gladys, Plumtree-Parent: IT31-05-05)

A white middle-class parent, who was a teacher in Croxfield added:

[The committee] is run by all those nice mumsy people who want to raise money, and have some time on their hands and good luck to them ... they are a closed shop ... I work a 60-hour week, so I can't help really, I do what I can ... It's run a by a very exclusive group of women and a lot of people feel quite alienated, but they probably wouldn't say, because some parents feel that if they complain they might rock the boat or it might come back, you know, somebody might find out that they said something.

(Shona, Plumtree-Parent: IT3-11-04)

These testimonies indicate a high level of interpersonal solidarity, emotional conformity and commitment amongst the members of the committee, which generated boundaries of exclusion, experienced as alienating by those who could/did not participate in the wider field.

Chloe, Anthea, Ellie and Kirsten's involvement coincided with the committee's increasing power and white middle-class dominance within the parental field. The forms of participation which it sustained and encouraged added ritual density (the intensity and frequency of situated interactions) to their felt belonging to Plumtree, further reifying their membership and commitment to it: "I always felt very involved and I was involved with the Parents' Committee before I started to work here." (Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT20-10-04). It was within this socialising context that the idea of becoming a TA materialised and "made sense".

I was the right kind of person before they knew, because I was out in the playground, I was coming in doing voluntary reading; I was involved with the school Parents' Committee ... I was known around the school. And I think that does happen, you know, that's a good way to get yourself known. And then sometimes spaces come up and they grab people who've been hanging around in the playground.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

There is a clear reflexivity shown by Ellie in the above extract, regarding her own positioning vis-à-vis other parents and the school, a determinate strategic feel for the game within the parental field. We can see here the "practical sense" which Bourdieu refers to in describing the relationship between the habitus and the social world, a "social sensitivity which guides us ... [and] constitutes the world as meaningful by spontaneously anticipating its immanent tendencies" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 21). This relationship generated in Ellie's case a latent expectation and orientation towards the future which saw the prospect of TA work as immanent in the present, as something which "people like us" do. None of these women had ever entertained the idea of TA work prior to their experiences in the parental field but, at this juncture, it seemed to make sense and almost to be inevitable. It was here that opportunity structures and subjective orientations shaped by the distribution of resources in the fields in play intersected.

I was offered the job, when I was doing voluntary, my daughter was in the nursery, I was coming in three days a week ... and our deputy head at the time he said, "How would you like a job?" And that was it.

(Kirsten, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04)

Anthea and Ellie were similarly offered positions within a few months of each other. Chloe was the last of the four to make the transition, and it is likely that the fact that

the other three were already employed in the school added to the desirability of the position. She had formally applied for a TA post and been unsuccessful. But a few weeks later she was asked to come in and “help out”: “And so I had a sort of week probation, and then they just said, ‘Yeah, you can come. We’ll take you on’” (IT27-01-05). As with the other women, she was comfortable about the role: “I was on the management committee at the kids’ nursery and that was all meaty ... stuff and all that. So I was up for it” (Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05).

These narratives powerfully convey the very different ways in which these women were positioned within the parental field, in contrast to working-class parents discussed above, and its particular character. In contrast, at Greenvale, there did not appear to be similar opportunities for middle-class action or enactments of valorised identities. Parental involvement as an open-ended expansive practice was not encouraged by the head, Bev. The senior leadership controlled the opportunities for parental involvement through sanctioned channels, such as *ad hoc* work in the nursery, school trips and parent evenings (which were well attended). Although there was also a Parents’ Committee at Greenvale, it was not autonomous from the school, and was largely organised by senior staff, rather than the parents. The Committee appeared quite remote and held little significance for most parents. When asked about the Committee, my Turkish-speaking parent informants responded:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Dilhan: | I don’t even know who works in the parents’ clubs, I mean I don’t know who to go to or speak to if I have a problem. I don’t know who they are, how many of them there are. I just don’t know. |
| Çemile: | I don’t know for what purpose it was established.  |
| Çiçek:  | Because of our problem with English, we can’t participate in parents’ club.  |
| Didem:  | In fact, they elect certain people among themselves; it’s nothing to do with us.   |

(FG8-06-05)

This sense of disconnection was reiterated by Abigail, a white middle-class mother, who had previously been treasurer of the Committee:

We put up events, people don’t turn up, you talk to people and you try and involve people, then what else can you do? Actually having an organisation that is involving everybody is quite difficult, some people have the capacity to be

involved, other people don't, depending on their individual circumstances, so I don't know what the answer is ... There were four of us, and there are 650 or so pupils, and most of the time it would just be the four of us at meetings with her (Bev), what can four people do, really, effectively?

(Abigail, Greenvale-Parent: IT8-06-05)

Consequently, school-home relations at Greenvale were more formal and strongly insulated. In this sense, from the parental perspective, Greenvale was a less open school compared to Plumtree, reflecting a legacy of traditional classed home-school relations of education. The parental field was differently constituted. Parents were not able to utilise it as a space for the mobilisation of voice as they did at Plumtree. Equally, volunteering was not constructed as a prestigious activity, nor were the symbolic profits for middle-class parents obvious at Greenvale. As one prominent white middle-class mother said of her four years as the Parents' Committee treasurer:

I just didn't really feel welcomed really ... [I] wasn't invited to use the staffroom. I don't think they know how to work with people from outside.

(Abigail, Greenvale-Parent: IT8-06-05)

The precise reasons for some of these contrasts relate to the way power was negotiated and wielded, and the development of school-neighbourhood relations, which is elaborated on in the next chapter in relation to headship. In this context, it is sufficient to note the more supportive and symbolically motivating context in which middle-class transitions occurred at Plumtree.

#### **6.2.4. Transitions in the parental field**

It is apparent from Chloe, Ellie, Kirsten and Anthea's retrospective accounts that they were effusive about the prospect of making the transition to TA work. In common with working-class parents, it was seen as work compatible with and enabling of their domestic lives and mothering. As Anthea put it: "it fitted in really well with the children. Not only being at the same school, but being the right hours" (Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT12-04-04). However, as I go on to show, for these mothers, making the transition was a consequence of their attraction to the *particularity* of Plumtree as well as the type of work and other practical considerations.

For these women, Plumtree was already an important part of their lives. Working there would be a continuation, and deepening, of their on-going relationship with the

school and the wider middle-class parental field, and of their sense of belonging in Northwick. Plumtree was becoming the locus of their experience and symbolisation of the neighbourhood as a village. At the same time, Plumtree offered access to the working-class minority ethnic groups within the neighbourhood, who were otherwise an occluded presence in these women's lives. Working at Plumtree offered them an opportunity to penetrate the symbolic veil which shrouded their vision of Northwick. When I asked about her motivations for working at Plumtree, Chloe responded:

Chloe: Finding out more about the community, or them knowing me and just being a, sort of, trusted member ... of the community.

Ayo: What community are you talking about?

Chloe: Oh, local people, whether it's, you know, the shopkeepers, the Turkish folk, the this, the that, everyone, you know, the Guardian readers on Jessop Road<sup>50</sup>, whoever, you know, whatever.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Equally, working at Plumtree facilitated the realisation of particular mothering ideologies and values (Duncan, 2005). Becoming a TA reflected a desire for closeness with their children, to have an insight into their lives: a wish to be seen as mothers. This was expressed as an aspiration for omnipresence and practical control in their children's lives.

It's really good to know exactly what's going on in the school, and ... the kind of things that they would do every day, what they'll be experiencing, you know, like at playtime and lunchtime and what-have-you, and it's really nice to know what they're doing in class as well. 'Cos I think – when I was working full-time, I did not have a clue what they did.

(Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT22-05-04)

These enactments of mothering by Chloe, Kirsten, Anthea and Ellie could be seen as emblematic of what Bell describes, after (Hays, 1998), as the ideology of “intensive mothering”:

Among other things, the ideology of intensive mothering obscures power and inequality in the practice of mothering. Its depiction of mothers as self-sacrificing, devoted to the care of others, and inspired by love romanticizes the work that mothers do. It obscures the extent to which mothering is “an arena of political struggle” that includes multiple, shifting, and intersecting dimensions of power relations ... Even those mothers who disagree with and/or who do

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<sup>50</sup> A road where a significant number of white middle-class parents lived.

not conform to the ideology of intensive mothering are nonetheless affected by it. They are judged by others according to how closely their practices fit with it and position themselves against it. (2004: 48-9)

TA work seemed to enable these middle-class women to personally resolve the tension generated by the “ideological link between ‘good mothering’ and mothering in the home” (Holloway, 1999: 456) whilst at the same time implicitly reinforcing its power. Working as a TA held out the promise of friendship, social prestige and belonging, as well as facilitating the deployment of social, cultural and symbolic capital in their children’s schooling and development. From this perspective TA work was a way out of the cul-de-sac of the structural constraints of gender, and a way of negotiating the conflicting cultural expectations governing middle-class mothering and work identity:

When my kids are older I’ll be able to say, actually I was at school with my kids, you know, I was still a working mum but I was still around at school with my kids.

(Kirsten, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04)

In making the shift to TA work, these mothers entered a fluid social space, in which the boundaries of self, home/school and private/public were being reconfigured. It was, from their perspectives, the continuation of a dense and complex web of social relations and ties – developed through volunteer labour – which were now superimposed onto a novel employee/employer relationship. The shift in personal trajectories away from full-time work towards mothering should also be interpreted in light of a wider social shift towards *localisation* in these women’s households and lifestyle, a process of embedding themselves within Northwick and ways of *belonging*. These women’s involvement as *parents* with Plumtree was therefore an important element in the constitution of the gentrified habitus, and their desire to “build a local community within the global city that maps onto their particular set of values, backgrounds, aspirations and resources” (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 11). For these mothers, the appeal of TA work resided in its specificity – that it was at Plumtree and not some other school – and the resonance it held for them in relation to the wider formation of their middle-class identities and engrossment in interaction rituals within Northwick.

For both working-class and middle-class informants TA work was *more* than “just a job”. It reflected desires for self-transformation and belonging which, as the following chapters show, are contested and may not be realisable by all. The next section briefly discusses those individuals who did not fit the patterns examined thus far. This further illuminates the complex personal and social formations of TAs.

### **6.3.      *Ambiguities and indeterminate locations***

The habitus of a particular individual or group, as Bourdieu suggest, is “systematic” in a loose sense where “all the elements of his or her behaviour have something in common, a kind of affinity of style, like the works of the same painter” (2005: 44). There were a number of TAs at Plumtree and Greenvale whose trajectories were ambiguous and social location indeterminate, thus they do not fit the predominant patterns discussed in the chapter thus far. These women inhabit an “oscillating borderland between classes”, ethnicities and racial identification (Bourdieu, 1987: 13). This ambiguity, as shown in later chapters, has revealing implications for their positioning within the institutional order. Amongst those from a middle-class background, this applies to Leah, Michelle, and Lillian, whose distinctiveness stems from their relation to the dominant constructions of middle-class whiteness and the locality.

Leah’s Jewish parents had been part of an earlier wave of gentrification in the late 1970s within Northwick and she was Croxfield born and bred. Whilst unambiguously middle-class – her father was an academic and her mother a psychoanalyst – she had been educated in Croxfield’s multi-ethnic urban schools, and thus had developed a thoroughgoing bi-culturality or hybridised habitus which was reflected in her ability to code-switch comfortably between the registers of London working-class speech and more middle-class repertoires. Moreover, her Jewish heritage provided Leah with a somewhat different formation and understanding of what being white and middle-class in Northwick meant.

Lillian and Michelle, both university-educated white women, were partnered with working-class African-Caribbean men, and mothers of mixed-race children. Their mixed-race and mixed-class situation thus gave them a somewhat different (and often problematic) relation to middle-class whiteness (Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Olumide, 2002). In



contrast to Lillian, and in common with Leah, Michelle was Croxfield born and bred with strong intergenerational links in the area, which resulted in a familiarity and ease with its dominant working-class cultural forms and expression. Thus, these three women demonstrate something of the complexity and range of the middle-class habitus found in the two schools.

Bahar also had an ambiguous class location and relation to the neighbourhood. Born and schooled in Cyprus, with some tertiary education in the UK, she had a disjointed working life, with the greater part spent in assistant roles within Croxfield. Whilst sharing a linguistic and cultural heritage with some of the Turkish speaking groups in the neighbourhood, reinforced by her occupational experiences working with Turkish-speaking learners in Croxfield, she did not live in the borough and her household position was more financially secure than most of the working-class TAs. As a consequence of excluding Lillian and Michelle from the main analysis here, there were no discussions of middle-class TAs at Greenvale in this chapter<sup>51</sup>.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has mapped the personal and occupational formations of informants as reflected in the development of the habitus. TA work appealed to informants for a number of complex reasons, rooted in their trajectories and experiences across different fields with individuals bringing a class-differentiated set of resources, expectations and relationships to the locality as they made transitions into TA work. Only amongst male informants, who appeared to be seeking ways to give back to the imagined urban community (i.e. Marlon, Justin, Paul and Andre), did TA work appear to be explicitly linked to the development of a specified vocational habitus centred on working with young children. Overall, the analysis indicates that embarking on assistant work is very much about *identity* and *belonging*.

In relation to the feminine working-class and black masculine habitus, trajectories were characterised by their relatively marginalised and dominated positions in the social space. Schooling and educational careers were experienced more negatively, and characterised by symbolic misrecognition (for some, experiences of racism), and

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<sup>51</sup> In the next chapter I discuss further reasons for the particular class composition of TAs across the two schools.

unsettled trajectories and transitions. This was within a context of growing up in households with scarce financial and other material resources. A few informants left school with no qualifications, and many developed vocational orientations through additional education and training. For these informants, work, education and other considerations of family appeared to be more interwoven with and constricted by wider structural forces for “getting by”. Whilst their habitus and working trajectories reflected the constriction of their positions, there was also evidence of creativity and agency in the ways in which several informants, such as Agnes, Marlon and Justin, utilised their alternative forms of capitals to forge relatively stable employment trajectories; “making out”.

In contrast, the formation of the feminine middle-class habitus unfolded differently. Educational careers were consolidated in embodied and institutional forms of capital such as high-status knowledge and qualifications. This was set against a background of relative affluence. These capitals and dispositions were transposed into occupational fields, which reinforced these women’s sense of self-efficacy and control over their life-plans and the possibilities of their realisation, as well as providing further opportunities for the development of their expressive repertoire. Whilst there were small perturbations in these women’s trajectories, particularly that of Chloe, they had all managed, in comparison to the working-class informants, relatively frictionless journeys through the social space up to the point of motherhood. As Bourdieu observed, the “more power one has over the world, the more one has aspirations that are adjusted to their chances of realisation, and also stable and little affected by symbolic manipulation” (2000: 226).

Mothering, as documented, was an important shaping influence for middle-class women and some working-class women, albeit in different ways. As Reay notes: “Mothers operate with widely varying constraints on their involvement in schooling, but they all share the constraint of working within a patriarchal society” (1998: 156). Mothering generated tensions and dilemmas for how these women managed their commitments to their working lives and their newly-ascribed mothering identities and care for their children. For middle-class women this was negotiated in different ways (e.g. a nanny, in Anthea’s case) which reflected their better-resourced social locations. Equally, the mothering identities they were able to claim and perform appeared to have been more

valorised. In contrast, mothering for some working-class women was constraining and entrenched their social marginalisation and isolation. Others managed to sustain their commitment to their work identities as well as their mothering. This evident commitment to worker identities partly reflected the high numbers of black women amongst working-class informants. Reynolds suggests that for black women:

The historical experience of slavery, colonialism and economic migration, within a British context, shows black mothers' economic labour capacity for work is a primary status. For black mothers today a tension exists in balancing this mother/worker status against the discriminatory conditions that they face as part of their daily working lives and the desire for greater personal choice and freedom in their working practices. (2001: 1061)

For mothers, their identities as parents were often more salient in accounting for their transitions into assistant work. Interactions with primary schools resonated with dominant patterns of nurturing evident in their own domestic practices. It was within this context that TA work emerged as a likely transition and transposition. For middle-class informants, TA work was imbued with a seductive vision of belonging within Northwick, reflective of the gentrified habitus as outlined in chapter 5. TA work emerged within these women's narratives as a continuation of their classed intensive mothering work which involved a highly socialising and successful interpolation of identities within the parental field. Occupying *dominant* positions in the *colonising* parental field, it thus seemed "natural" for these middle-class mothers to take up paid positions as assistants. At the same time, their transitions appeared to *naturalise* and legitimate their gendered mothering as *valued* and *valuable*. In fact, their transitions, as will be highlighted in the next chapter, were part of a pivotal moment in transformation of the parental field and the insertion of middle-class power into the school. The change represented by these women's transition signalled new class (and implicitly racialised) relations between the school and the locality. As Reay and colleagues observe:

In a class-ridden, racist society, to embody both whiteness and middle-classness is to be a person of value. It is also to be a person who makes value judgments that carry symbolic power; a valuer of others. (2007: 1042)

In embodying both whiteness and middle-classness these mothers were in the process of disturbing the traditional relationships of power expressed through assistant work with far reaching consequences, as I show in later chapters. For working-class mothers,

their investments within the parental field were less intense and circumscribed, and negotiated in relation to their more limited resources and confidence. The more controlled opportunities for participation for parents at Greenvale were reflective of differently constructed social relations between the school and neighbourhood. Thus, the parental field had less salience in accounting for their specific transitions.

The theme of belonging was woven into most informants' narratives, albeit in different ways. For working-class informants, belonging was actively accomplished through their on-going social ties and actions within the locality and changes in their sense of self (in relation to mothering for some, whilst for others, notably men, to their own civic and work practices with marginalised youth). TA work was the expression of their long-term sense of commitment and a sense of belonging to the imagined urban community, and the deeper normative values and images which those sentiments reflected. In contrast, amongst white middle-class mothers, TA work in Plumtree was a reflection of the localisation of the habitus, and the search for community amongst like-minded people. As newcomers to the neighbourhood, they had to negotiate belonging through significant changes in their lives, sense of self (particularly in relation to mothering, which generated opportunities and changes in their daily interaction rituals) and the original geographic contexts in which they were socialised. Assistant work from their perspective offered a valuable symbolic and cultural resource in their construction of community as they attempted to forge new "urban bonds" in the gentrified inner-city (Blokland, 2003).

The differentiated habitus specified in detail in this chapter provides the essential materials through which TA institutional action and perspectives will be understood. It is this habitus which animates action, and is built upon and modified within the educational and institutional contexts and interaction rituals of school. In the following chapters, the focus changes to the institutional. More specifically, the next chapter considers the common factors in the organisation of assistants' work situation in relation to teachers' own practices and expectations across both schools. The substantive focus is however on headship and leadership style in relation to the challenges presented by middle-class parental power, and how this frames educational work.

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## Chapter 7 – The Negotiation of Educational Work

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The actions and utterances of leaders frame and shape the context of action in such a way that the members of that context are able to use the meaning thus created as a point of reference for their own action and understanding of the situation. (Smircich and Morgan, 1982: 261)

In this chapter, I examine the substantive themes which arose in relation to the organisation of educational work within Plumtree and Greenvale and the institutional inflection of the class struggles of the localities. These are developed in relation to two foci. First, there is examination of assistants' work situation across both schools, with an emphasis on outlining the common factors that shape its organisation – such as teachers' practices and expectations, time and spatial constraints, and assistants' habitus. A number of studies have indicated that assistants occupy highly unequal positions within classroom interactions, and have attributed this, in part, to teachers' classroom practices, and underlying inequalities in the distribution of institutional power (Cable, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Martin-Jones and Saxena, 2003). However, assistants' work situation has less frequently been examined in relation to the wider determinations of the locality, in particular, how the class context presented by gentrification shapes educational work. The second and related focus is on headship and leadership style<sup>52</sup> in determining the institutional contexts of educational work in the schools, and mediating the impact of middle-class colonisation. This issue remains underdeveloped within gentrification literature. In Butler and Robson's study of the Frank Whittle school discussed in chapter 2, the head was portrayed as a powerful figure whose sympathetic support of middle-class mobilisation facilitated the colonisation of the school (2001: 82). There was little sense in their study of how the actions of the head were viewed by staff, or how the head's ideological orientation shaped his responses to gentrification and middle-class mobilisation. The aim therefore is to offer a fuller and more nuanced account of headship under conditions of class colonisation.

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<sup>52</sup> I use the term leadership style to simply refer to the cultural style and expressive identities enacted in relation to a head's positional authority. It should be viewed as a derivation from the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2.

This chapter should be read as a bridge between the themes of social and cultural struggle and formation in the social space, developed earlier, and the emergent concerns and problematics of the institutional order. The outline of the chapter is as follows: first I present a broad outline of the common features of TAs' classroom work situation, the way that it was organised and the perceived constraints that shaped dominant patterns of work, so as to contextualise other aspects of their institutional experience. Then the key themes of gender habitus and pupil focus are examined in relation to the division of labour between assistants and teachers in the classroom. The second part of the chapter considers the enactments and contexts of Tom's headship at Plumtree. It shows how his leadership was negotiated in relation to the expectations and concerns of staff and parents, and how this shaped assistants and teachers' sense of the institutional order, their work situation and principal pedagogic roles – teaching and discipline. This is followed by a similar and comparative documentation of Bev's headship and leadership at Greenvale.

### **7.1. *Institutional nomads: constraints and action***

Before considering the issue of leadership, I will briefly discuss some of the key features of the organisation of TAs' work which are relevant in contextualising assistants' and teachers' wider institutional experiences. Assistants undertook a range of activities as part of their day-to-day work including: supporting children's learning in a variety of contexts; working with groups and individuals (frequently withdrawing them outside the classroom); delivering and leading specific literacy, numeracy, and other pedagogic intervention programmes; assessing, monitoring and recording children's progress, organising the classroom and resources; putting up displays, photocopying and preparing resources and assisting with other administrative tasks as and when they arose, both for themselves and teachers. Several also regularly did playground and/or meals supervision<sup>53</sup>. The mix of activities within any particular assistants' job role varied, and some duties attracted differential pay and rewards<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> In general middle-class TAs did not undertake meals/playground supervision.

<sup>54</sup> It should also be noted that aspects of learning mentors' roles again were differently constituted. In contrast to most assistants, mentors had their own offices where they engaged in more explicit therapeutic and socio-emotional work with pupils. Pay and conditions were generally better, as they were linked to specific funding streams (DCSF, 2007; Golden *et al.*, 2001). Whilst these differences are clearly important, I am concerned here with the broader patterns of individuals' institutional positioning and experiences as *assistants*.

Observing TAs at work, key aspects of the organisation of their work situation quickly became apparent. Firstly, in contrast to teachers, TAs were highly mobile. They often worked with a number of different teachers and children in different classes during the school day, and came into contact with a range of other adults, including parents, teachers and other support staff. From a classroom perspective, the continuous presence of one teacher all day seemed static compared to the nomadic movements of most assistants. TAs frequently made spatial transitions (and contingent shifts in role expectations) between classrooms, other spaces, differing work activities and associated interaction rituals. This emphasised an expansive orientation to school life which was not solely fixed on classroom life, and infused TAs' sense of the institutional landscape as fluid.

Assistants' work also tended to be responsive. Some TAs were regularly re-deployed to different classes and activities on a daily and weekly basis, irrespective of their established routines, in response to specific incidents or the perceived needs of teachers. As Andre told me: "basically from week to week I don't know where I'll be. Tomorrow I could be somewhere else and the next day and so on" (Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05). Whilst not all TAs worked in this way – for example those working with younger pupils lower down the school, particularly nursery nurses, tended to have more regular working patterns – this was the dominant pattern for most assistants. Even for those whose working activities were more anchored to specific classrooms and teachers, the possibility that they could be re-deployed at any time inflected their expectations about where and with whom they would be working.

Some TAs seemed to respond positively to these nomadic patterns of work; in particular, the lack of fixed routines and responsibilities in comparison to teachers' work: "There is no paperwork as such. There is no curriculum I have to follow, apart from following the teacher's curriculum, obviously." (Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05). However, the majority of TAs in both schools found aspects of their nomadic existence constraining. Variable working patterns and *ad hoc* deployment appeared to limit the development of relationships with other assistants and teachers. Also, assistants' working hours generally started later and finished earlier than teachers, and few shared the same break and lunch times (see also Calder, 2003). This tended to

position assistants somewhat on the margins of communication structures and flows within the schools<sup>55</sup>.

Basically you are only there for the hours you are paid for, whereas teachers stay on, and they go to meetings, and they meet about certain children, and if you are *lucky* that gets fed back to you. Very often it doesn't. So you are slightly out of the loop.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: FG19-11-03)

Equally, TAs' working patterns left little or no time for preparation during the school day for their pedagogic activities. Unlike teachers, TAs did not have any allocated time to plan their work, and any planning tended to be done at home, unpaid.

Overall, these constraints, shaped by assistants' working patterns and the relatively poor level of resourcing of their role and work, structured the contours of assistants' everyday world and perspectives. The next section considers how the division of labour between TAs and teachers was negotiated.

### **7.1.1. The division of labour**

Within the classroom, teachers' expectations and substantive practices provided perhaps the most important immediate influence on assistants' work situation. As the lead educators, teachers were the primary definers of the situational realities of the classroom. Further, they were the primary order-givers in relation to pupils and TAs. Thus, it was largely in relation to teachers' more authoritative priorities, expectations and representation of the classroom situation that TAs' developed their own situated identities and investments, and the division of labour was negotiated (Rueda and Monzó, 2002). This meant for assistants meeting the demands and expectations of teachers as competent participants in the classroom interaction ritual:

After a few months you know what the teacher wants and expects from the class ... Rules change because the teacher changes, that's all. My job stays the same. Follow the teacher, whatever she says goes as far as I am concerned.

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

Agnes' comments are typical of that found in the literature, as exemplified by the following extract from an assistant in Lowe and Pugh's study:

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<sup>55</sup> This emerged as a problematic issue at Plumtree and is discussed in chapter 8.



As a teaching assistant I am told what my role is and what to do for each day. My role can change several times throughout the day and my role is to follow orders and instructions. (2007: 28)

Bourne also found that “There is a clear power asymmetry in the roles constructed ... between the class teacher who controls the classroom space, time and curriculum content, and the unqualified, low paid ‘supporting resource’” (Bourne, 2001: 256). From assistants’ perspective therefore, classroom interaction rituals generated strong cues for situational conformity and support of teachers’ actions, particularly in relation to pupils.

If you think that ... something has happened where maybe one of the other teachers may be in the wrong with a child, you never let the child see that you’re on their side, and you never argue ... in front of the children. You always will support the teacher ... You know ... you never show like you’re fighting against each other, you always have to remain as a group, as a unit.

(Paul, Plumtree-TA: IT16-06-04)

Gender was also a significant theme in relation to the way work was shared within the classrooms that I observed. Teachers spoke most admiringly of those TAs who exhibited qualities and dispositions of care, sensitivity, self-sacrifice and subservience to their own needs as teachers and those of pupils. These were women who displayed what Colley refers to as “sacrificial femininity” in their cultural style “linked to affect (the construction, management and display of feelings) and moral rectitude (appearing ‘nice’, being ‘nice’ and ‘doing good’)” (2003: 488). There was a valuing of assistants who were invested in their classroom identities in caring for others and deployed stereotypically feminine forms of cultural capital.

somebody like Lucia, who looks at her job in the widest possible sense ... interprets her job as being ... supportive of her child [that she is assigned to] and supportive of the class, and the teacher. Then, they then are prepared, out of good will, as much as anything else ... then to give their service in a far more generous way.

(Estella, Plumtree-Teacher: IT20-06-04)

Those that were perceived to lack the appropriate feminine dispositions of care or sensitivity were evaluated negatively or viewed as problematic:

Sometimes you may get a support staff who’s not able to extend themselves beyond what it is they are supposed to do ... they kind of draw the line, and

sometimes you kind of have to explain things to them a bit more, to the extent you are not asking them to do extra duties.

(Adelaide, Greenvale-Teacher: IT22-06-05)

These expectations embedded within classroom interactions encouraged amongst assistants an expansive and extended conception of their role; as Gail remarked, “you just fit in, you do what needs doing basically” (Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05). This theme is illustrated in the extracts below:

I do a lot more admin and stuff than I would probably have to do, so to speak, but then it has to be done. You know, these things do have to get – someone does have to do the photocopying, you can’t – I mean Estella [the teacher] can’t do it all, take it all on and do it herself.

(Lucia, Plumtree-TA: IT19-05-04)

we are basically there for one reason, but that reason often spreads out to everything else, so you just do anything you’re asked to do ... So that’s how we make life easier for the teacher.

(Ruth, Plumtree-TA: IT12-05-04)

It was apparent that teachers’ idealised image, and the expectations which they expressed, appeared to resonate most with female assistants (both working-class and middle-class) and the feminine habitus. For several of the women, like Lucia, the dispositions of care activated in relation to their mothering and domestic contexts seemed to be easily mobilised in relation to their gender identities within the interaction order of the classroom. As Skeggs argues, “to speak as a caring person produces an identity of value for the self, which also capitalises on prior female experience” (1997: 69). This analysis is further supported by my observations of classrooms where there were both male and female assistants. At Plumtree, I noted that the male assistants who worked in the same classroom as Ruth rarely did any tidying and other “menial” tasks. When asked why she frequently undertook additional work around the classroom, Ruth explained:

Don’t know if it’s because it’s a man thing, they don’t think they should be doing this sort of thing or what. But it really aggravates me ... A woman sees things a man doesn’t – it looks different to a woman’s eye. Every day, I come in and think I’m not going to do any labouring but I can’t because I can see it needs doing. It needs doing. A man won’t see that – it’s like at home, a man won’t see that it’s filthy ... They won’t just do it, they’ll do it if you tell them, but it’s because they can’t see it.

(Ruth, Plumtree-TA: FN10-09-04)

Martin (2003) writes that gender is enacted through these subtle connections and parallels that women often make between their domestic positioning and their organisational roles. She points out that work often:

parallels practices at home, for example, “fix my dinner,” “wash my clothes,” “clean my home,” “cook my food,” or “raise my kids.” Such requests, while operative, are rarely articulated; they are simply understood. (2003: 346-7)

In contrast, when asked why he did not undertake some of these tasks, Andre’s response indicated a concern that to do so would present a *discreditable* performance of masculinity to the children:

it doesn’t help if you’re in class, and the class teacher decides, “yeah, I want you to do this and do that,” And you’re coming in and [the] children are coming in and you’re sharpening pencils and you’re cleaning ... and children pick these things up, and they will say this to you, and everything ... “It’s your job to do that” ... And me, *because I’m a male*, and I say, “I’m just not doing it, you can go and see the guys downstairs [referring to the head and deputy], I’m like really busy and stuff ... ” and I just won’t do it. [added emphasis]

(Andre, Plumtree-TA: IT16-06-04)

Andre’s resistance to the implicit division of labour between TAs and teachers and its motivating assumptions can be read as highlighting the way in which masculinity could be mobilised as a resource within interactions between a predominantly female teaching staff and the few male assistants in either school. Such direct resistance would be more difficult for women, as it would go against the expectations of the valued forms of femininity operative in the interaction order, and because “disrupting the gender order is seen as ‘rocking the boat’” (Martin, 2003: 347). Gender might also account for the findings reported elsewhere, where “fear among paraeducators in confronting teachers was common because they did not wish to create an uncomfortable working environment” (Rueda and Monzó, 2002: 516). In addition, Andre’s concerns about his presentation of self underline the expectations which govern the presence of men within a predominantly female institutional context. As Owen explains, in his study of male teachers in the Early Years workforce:

The role is apparently to embody notions of masculinity, as well as to challenge those notions. There is the additional burden, as most of these men were the only man in their nursery, of one man representing all men, when there are many ways of “doing” masculinity. (2003: 5)

In being expected – and wanting – to do whatever needed doing, many of the female assistants I observed went out of their way to please teachers and undertake additional tasks, to “demonstrate respectability and responsibility”, and in so doing have their identities as “women” affirmed (Skeggs, 1997: 73). This opened them up to exploitation and overwork:

So a lot of it is you're just expected ... I don't know, you feel they're taking liberties sometimes ... You know, we're not really paid for that. You know, I'm getting a pittance to what a teacher gets ... none of us mind, but it isn't right. Not for the money we get paid anyway.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

In common with other studies, I found assistants undertook significant amounts of *unpaid* work, inside and outside of their school, for example, preparing curriculum resources, marking and so on (e.g. Farrell, Balshaw and Polat, 2000; UNISON, 2002; UNISON, 2004). Irrespective of how much assistants extended themselves (e.g. working unpaid during lunch breaks, teaching intervention programmes to small groups), there was always more for them to do.

### **7.1.2. TAs' pupil focus**

Another important theme in relation to the division of labour within the classroom is assistants' focus on the more marginalised pupils. My observations suggest that this pupil focus arose out of what many of the teachers saw as the conflicting demands on their time, energies and other resources. Teachers saw it as increasingly difficult to effectively deliver the National Curriculum in relation to the realities of large class sizes and a polarised pupil intake produced by the local social structure. These factors appeared to legitimise practices requiring the hierarchical differentiation and sorting of pupils, and are exemplified in the extract below:

It's a lot of pressure fitting everything, and going by the curriculum, there is so many things you're supposed to do in one day, and one week ... I think there is a need [for assistants] because of differentiation ... because you've got these groups, you've got the literacy programmes, phonics, and all these things they've [the government] brought in, you need support to do that, because the teacher can't do that and teach the class.

(Adelaide, Greenvale-Teacher: IT22-06-05)

In addition, pressures and demands from middle-class parents on teachers' time and energies, for specialised/individualised educational provision for their children, made it more likely that teachers would strive for greater *differentiation* within the orchestrating of their teaching. This in turn was likely to strengthen the boundaries between categories of learners and marginalise those that were considered problematic and the responsibility of assistants.

Someone like Jack [a middle-class pupil] is very difficult to cater for, you know ... they are being streamed in mathematics, they should be being stretched. I've put together packs for them to take home; I'm running extension English classes on a Friday afternoon for them, which is quite demanding stuff. So I mean there's only so much you can do, you know. You see, Jack's father would probably like me to be, sort of, looking at the internal workings of the space shuttle and ... being able to break down the component parts and reassemble them with a little bit more thrust at between seventy and eighty thousand metres altitude, you know. But sorry, daddy, you know, I am only human.

(Dave, Greenvale-Teacher: IT11-02-05)

It was in relation to these constraints and priorities that assistants' pupil focus within the classroom (and by extension outside it) was determined. Assistants' tended to have responsibility for children with statements of SEN, those in the process of SEN categorisation, or those that were simply referred to as being "needy", "difficult", "challenging" of authority, or any combination of these commonly-used labels. In general these were the pupils who appeared to be experiencing the most difficulties in school. This has been a consistent finding within the literature, particularly in relation to those categorised as having SEN (Blatchford *et al.*, 2007; Blatchford *et al.*, 2008; Blatchford *et al.*, 2006; Bowers, 1997; Clayton, 1993; Farrell, Balshaw and Polat, 2000; Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997a). From a sociological perspective, these pupils shared a common position in relation to the classroom or institutional order: teachers found them "problematic" and they could not easily be comprehended "within the structure of the teacher's common-sense" and professional experience (Sharp and Green, 1975: 119). These were pupils with whom teachers found it especially difficult to interact under their present institutional conditions of work and integrate their cultural styles and expressive identities within the interaction order. Teachers shifted responsibility for these pupils to assistants, reducing the "problem" of having to devote "too much" of their time to these difficult children (Sharp and Green, 1975: 123). In both schools, the few male assistants, all of whom were black or mixed heritage, tended to be

deployed to work with *black boys* – whom many teachers in both schools perceived as particularly problematic:

I hate every time I moan, at children in my class, and every name I'll rattle off, with the exception of one child; they're all boys and there is five of them, they're all boys and four of them are black ... and it's, it can't be them, it's got to be us, the system, it's got to be something that we are not doing, something that we are not connecting or touching, or something, and I hate it.

(Erica, Greenvale-Teacher: IT19-05-05)

We have had a job convincing black boys to buy into the system. They almost feel it's a sell-out ... They have a problem with seeing themselves – seeing learning, the whole school environment as a place they need to succeed.

(Yvette, Plumtree-Teacher: IT23-06-04)

Assistants therefore enabled teachers and schools to manage the tensions and contradictions of urban schooling, both in the narrow sense of establishing discipline and order within the classroom, but also the wider sense of social control/exclusion. They were essential to processes of differentiation and commonly accepted ways of orchestrating work within the classrooms that I observed (see also Hallam, Ireson and Davies, 2004). This theme can be seen in the following extract from a teacher:

When you have needy kids, if you don't have support staff you end up spending 80 per cent of the time trying to help 20 per cent of the kids, who probably aren't going to make much of education anyway, you know, you've got to be honest ... without support [staff] the bottom ... would absorb almost all my time.

(Isaac, Plumtree-Teacher: IT18-11-04)

Several assistants spoke about how their pupil focus inflected their experiences of work, for instance:

there's only one big difficulty [in the job], [which] is we always end up having the lower achieving children and you argue with ... teachers ... Always all the worst ones in the classroom, worst behaviour, worst learning, worst – anything worst you end up having it. So I find it that sometimes a bit depressing because it's like five/six of them that doesn't behave in the classroom and you have – I know you've got a smaller group but it's like you've got thirty children because each individual adds up to five kids when you look at the things.

(Bahar, Greenvale-TA: IT28-02-05)

Working with children perceived as challenging framed assistants' working lives and daily struggles, infusing their perspective with a set of concerns and interests, which at times diverged from those of classroom teachers. It endowed their work with meaning and value. Becker observed in the 1950s that within the urban school the wider social structure and processes of differentiation "operate to produce clients who make the worker's position extremely difficult" (1952: 451). This summary analysis of commonalities of the organisation of assistants' work suggests that in part, TAs' presence within the classroom appeared to offer teachers a way of negotiating the contradictions raised by the class structure.

Thus far the general features of assistants' work, and the pressures and demands which impinged on classroom realities have been outlined. Whilst these were *common* to both schools, they were *differently* actualised in relation to the institutional parameters established within each school. A key mediating factor within each of the schools was headship. The next section considers the role of headship and leadership style in shaping educational work and the wider institutional frames of experience.

## **7.2.        *Negotiating colonisation at Plumtree: the contexts of Tom's headship***

Ball has described some of the key tensions that encapsulate the head's role:

On the one hand, the head will be faced with the problem of maintaining control – in an organisational sense, ensuring continuance and survival, and in the educational sense, through the making and implementation of policy. Both aspects of control, or of domination, may embody and provoke conflict and opposition. On the other hand, therefore, the head must attend to the possibilities of solidarity, co-operation and the generation of enthusiasm and commitment. (1987: 83)

As leaders, heads give sense and meaning to the work and actions of others, through their capacity to redefine the educational and institutional goals of a school (Thayer, 1988). According to Ball, the possibilities of headship "are realised within the specific constraints of a particular setting, history and context" (1987: 81). Tom's headship was a paramount theme at Plumtree, and permeates the analysis in later chapters. Plumtree in the four years prior to the fieldwork had undergone some significant institutional changes that appeared to have generated an unsettled context in relation to which

Tom's headship must be understood. The previous longstanding head Meredith left in 2001. One parent described her as: "an exceptional head, one of the really old-fashioned heads, she looked like a head" (Shona, Plumtree-Parent: IT3-11-04). A teacher described her as being: "a systems person". Other informants' accounts suggest that Meredith exemplified strong leadership and had established firm boundaries, particularly in relation to middle-class parents. The chair of governors, himself a powerful figure at the school, had this to say:

We had in the past a very charismatic leader, who was very charismatic although not always approachable. When I met her again, a couple of weeks ago, I realised how – I feel I'm quite a confident person, but I was a bit intimidated, and I remembered how it used to be with Meredith.

(Adam, Plumtree-Chair-of-Governors: IT3-11-04)

Subsequent to her departure the school was led under two interim heads, including Peter, the current deputy, until the appointment of Tom in late 2002. It was during this transitional period that a number of the middle-class TAs such as Chloe, Ellie, and Kirsten made the transition as TAs into Plumtree. Peter's account of this period reveals that this was a pivotal moment in the school's ideological orientation towards the middle-class in the locality. In the following extract he explains why he decided to recruit assistants from the ranks of middle-class parent volunteers:

When I was the acting head ... I started this trend of employing many of the parents like Ellie, Anthea, Kirsten, many of the parents in the school, who we interviewed, and saw they had skills, they were all graduates and brought them into the school, and that sort of trend has continued with Chloe ... I thought it was one way of involving the community ... in a way which would engage their interests. Let me put it to you like this: if your child is in a school, you will redouble your efforts to improve that school, to make it better ... I thought the best way of ensuring that high-quality people would take part in the improvement of the school, was to seek parents from the local community, who were well educated, and were up to the tasks that we were giving them.

(Peter, Plumtree-Deputy: IT21-02-05)

In Peter's formulation, TA work was part of the on-going social and cultural exchange between the school and various groups within the parental field. Offering employment opportunities to middle-class parents was a way of consolidating and extending their involvement in the school, "local community". The assumption was that their self-interested actions and investments in the education of their own children could be



harnessed and socialised into an institutionalised collective good. It also suggested a reframing of what constituted the “community”, a reorientation towards the white middle-class and an occlusion of the working-class parents who were no longer viewed as potential partners in school improvement. It was middle-class parents who were evoked as sharing the same values, interests and the “right” dispositions to participate in school improvement. The incorporation of middle-class parents (i.e. mothers) was perceived both as a reward for their existing contributions and an inducement to develop their relationship with the school, with the prospect of greater access and “insider status”. Peter’s actions therefore also had symbolic value in relaying a new level of recognition of the white middle-class as the pre-eminent social group within the parental field. It was thus expressive of the school’s ideological alignment with the middle-class groups within the locality and a significant intervention in the forms of values operative within the parental field. As Lareau has argued, “the social profitability of middle-class arrangements is tied to the schools’ definition of the proper family-school relationship” (1987: 713). It would seem therefore that Peter’s actions established a context, and precedent, which increasingly made middle-class mobilisation profitable.

### **7.2.1. Middle-class parents**

The legacy of Meredith, the previous substantive head, and Peter’s own brief spell as interim head framed the challenges that Tom encountered, the options available to him, and how he was perceived. Tom had been a deputy in an urban school with a predominantly working-class Pakistani Muslim population within London and this was his first headship. His professional formation had occurred within a different configuration of parental expectations and demands, as he explained:

Their attitude as a group of parents, at my last school, was much more respectful of teachers as a profession. And in some ways you were trying to break that down a little bit, because there was – the esteem that they held teachers and head ... sometimes they wouldn’t question ... [what] happened. They ... let you get on and ... do your job sometimes, without questioning about the minutiae of things

(Tom, Plumtree-Head: IT21-02-05)

The assertiveness and cultural style of middle-class parents at Plumtree therefore represented a serious challenge, and contrast, to his professional practice and leadership style:

We're working with a highly-intelligent group of parents, so it's not – you don't want to patronise them ... They are quite demanding as parents. And, I think they're – there are a very small minority who seem to think people will drop things straightaway for them, or want to be seen straightaway.

(Tom, Plumtree-Head: IT21-02-05)

Tom also talked about other challenges that he faced within the school. In the main these centred on what he saw as the limited range of teachers' professional experience on the staff:

The problem with teachers here is they've never worked anywhere else. They're either people working here 20-odd years or people in the first few years of teaching. So they've not necessarily that experience of working elsewhere to be able to compare or do things differently ... And that's where I've found that hard.

(Tom, Plumtree-Head: IT21-02-05)

Whilst he described his leadership as one in which there was "shared ownership", he told me he had in the beginning been quite forceful in pushing through changes: "at the start there were certain things, bottom line, I want things done in a certain way" (IT21-02-05).

My observations and informants' accounts suggest that Tom had yet to establish his credibility in the eyes of many parents, a large number of whom still recalled Meredith's impressive leadership and presentation of self. Some parents commented negatively on his leadership style and expressivity within interactions. The chair of governors said:

Tom is a quieter leader, and that's tougher for some of the parents to accept ... I would say that he doesn't come across brilliantly in the playground or assemblies.

(Adam, Plumtree-Chair-of-Governors: IT3-11-04)

Other powerful parents reported that they found him approachable and receptive to their demands, but with caveats. One, speaking about an incident around which her and other middle-class parents mobilised against Tom, had this to say:

I find him very approachable, which is a big bonus, open to ideas, very aware that schooling is *supply and demand* ... What I am trying to say is that there are some groups of people who'll say "that's okay, that's what the school has organised" and there are other parents, "nope, we don't like this, and we want to change this," and that is what we have around here ... It's still a learning curve for Tom, I think, in some respects. One of the things he hadn't realised until that point maybe was how strong parent power is around here [laughs].

(Amy, Plumtree-Parent: IT9-11-04)

His leadership style therefore appeared attractive to some within the parental field, who found his emphasis on consultative talk a mode of interaction with which were they comfortable and able to exert interpersonal dominance:

I've now built up a rapport with Tom ... [and] I understand that he is receptive ... which has made me bold ... because I wouldn't certainly dream of dictating to him but it's just opened the lines of discussion ... he's been very cooperative and helpful with the [Parents' Committee]. He's completely un confrontational [sic] which I don't know how that works in terms of certain situations in terms of leadership, there is a slight lack of power in that area. In terms of the way I operate, he's perfect.

(Cynthia, Plumtree-Chair-of-PC: IT4-03-05)

For these very reasons, some voiced concerns about Tom's ability to personally confront or challenge the formidable power of middle-class parents at the school:

I think Plumtree parents are quite scary ... A lot of them earn more than [Tom] does, you know. And ... they have high incomes, a lot of them, and come from a position where the parent is the customer and the consumer-rights-based approach to school as a service, and what it's going to do for them.

(Kelly, Plumtree-Parent-Governor: IT11-07-05)

Negotiating the demands and pressures from middle-class parents therefore consumed a significant proportion of Tom's time and energies. "Sometimes here they – it seems to be the attitude often with some people, that things are always open for debate ... Consultation doesn't always mean you get your way" (Plumtree-Head: IT21-02-05). Whilst alive to the pressures and demands placed on him by some middle-class parents, Tom's focus and orientation towards this fraction of the parental body reinforced the general occlusion of working-class and minority ethnic parents.

I think Plumtree is an interesting school because we have a certain number of very articulate parents who make their views forcefully felt, and [they] are the

white middle-class parents. We have Bengali and Turkish parents who are much more reticent about coming forward, we know less about them.

(Adam, Plumtree-Chair-of-Governors: IT3-11-04)

As I show in the next section, the way Tom conducted himself in his dealings with staff, and the fact that he spent so much time responding to middle-class demands, became grounds for dissatisfaction in relation to the audience of assistants and teachers.

### **7.2.2. Institutional perspectives**

As indicated above, expectations of Tom's headship at Plumtree amongst parents were high, and it would seem equally so amongst staff. One teacher spoke about how she had been initially impressed by Tom's enthusiasm and vision for the school:

At the beginning, I remember in his very first talk he said, "I've got a vision."  
... And actually afterwards it's really nice when someone talks: "I've got these great ideas. We can do this, we can do that."

(Caragh, Plumtree-Teacher: IT19-01-05)

This soon gave way to disappointment. Assistants and teachers were overwhelmingly critical of Tom's headship. One informant perceived him to be distant and very much a "manager" rather than a "leader": "He's like a chief executive. He writes the policies, and manages things, but when it comes to the day-to-day stuff going on the school, he doesn't have a clue" (Yvette, Plumtree-Teacher: FN15-06-05). In contrast to Meredith's powerful demeanour and leadership style, which virtually all the staff recalled, Tom was seen as timid, lacking in confidence, and diffident in social interactions. He was judged to be inept at handling interpersonal conflict and lacking in assertiveness:

I think he finds it very difficult to talk to adults ... In meetings he seems very nervous. When you talk to him about something that you know he might not like or he might disagree with, he gets very nervous and on edge.

(Niamh, Plumtree-Teacher: IT19-01-05)

I don't think there's a clear idea of what he wants ... [There's] a lack of vision, a lack of conviction, and therefore a lack of self-confidence as well.

(Isaac, Plumtree-Teacher: IT18-11-04)

Tom's negotiation of parental demands, where he seemed unable to define what TAs and teachers saw as acceptable boundaries between the school and "external" agents, fostered perceptions of him as deferential and acquiescent:

I think probably Meredith was a stronger character ... I think sometimes Tom tries to please too many people instead of making his own decisions, maybe ... I just sometimes feel that you know he's trying to please the parents, please the governors, maybe sometimes he should take his own decisions [lowers her voice].

(Lucia, Plumtree-TA: IT27-06-05)

it's directed at needing to please parents more than it's needing to please us ... There are a number of situations where he's come down on the side of parents. And, yes, in some cases it's probably perfectly justifiable but we still need to know that he's there for us as well and he's, you know, he's our manager, he's our leader.

(Niamh, Plumtree-Teacher: IT19-01-05)

Whereas working-class TAs, as indicated by Lucia above, tended to acknowledge the agency and power of parents and other key individuals against which Tom had to assert himself, middle-class assistants tended to emphasise perceived deficiencies in *his* cultural style, rather than problems stemming from the increasingly blurred boundaries at the school. This is particularly apparent in relation to pedagogy and discipline, which is discussed in the next section.

Overall, therefore, Tom was seen as failing performatively to realise the power invested in his position as head. This called into question his credibility and the symbolic legitimisation of his leadership with staff. His performance of headship seemed devoid of the "social magic" that occurs when symbolic power is ceded (Bourdieu, 1991): "I think also, the other thing that lacks with the leadership is the real power I remember from school that my head teacher or headmistress had" (Avril, Plumtree-Teacher: IT 9-11-04). The problematic themes of Tom's headship and leadership are developed below in relation to assistants' classroom experience and pedagogic roles. Beforehand, it is worth briefly mentioning that leadership was not the sole preserve of Tom at Plumtree. The deputy post is also a significant leadership position (Nias, 1989; Nias, Southworth and Yeomans, 1989). At Plumtree, staff's general impressions of Peter seemed to closely mirror negative assessments of Tom.

He was not seen as significantly contrasting in leadership style to Tom, as this extract illustrates:

Peter ... is rather passive. I don't know what Peter does, I see him organising the staff in the sense of if somebody is on a course ... I see him working with gifted and talented children. It could be a lot tighter, it's not, both of them, they don't have like a presence, you know ... he's very lax about things.

(Fiona, Plumtree-Teacher: IT27-01-05)

### **7.2.3. Pedagogy: teaching and discipline**

One of the key sources of instability within assistants' work is the issue of deployment, which tends to fragment their working patterns. At Plumtree, this was a particularly problematic issue because of the way deployment decisions were mediated by Tom. There were several examples during the fieldwork where assistants were moved, without consultation, to different classrooms to support teachers. As Ellie commented: "I'm sometimes quite shocked at the way people are just, sort of, pulled about" (Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05). In some cases, these decisions seemed to have been influenced by parental action. There was a particular class where parents felt that the teacher and TA were failing to adequately deal with the "difficult children". As the situation escalated, two children were removed by their parents from the school. It was unclear whether this was directly related to the perceived problems in the class, but many other parents thought it was. Various assistants were deployed from elsewhere to support the teacher, including Andre and Chloe. The way Tom handled this situation appeared to reinforce an image of him as reactive and unable to assert himself in relation to parents' demands; it was felt that he had bowed to pressure rather than making a considered decision:

I'm thinking, well, how are you going actually measure whether anything's improved? ... I don't think they know. I mean, is it just how many parents knock on Tom's door every week taking their children out [of that class]? I don't know.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

As will become apparent, the way Tom negotiated competing demands, particularly in relation to parents, was a cause of general anger and discontent, generating a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty for assistants and teachers.

One of the key ways in which middle-class parents exerted influence at Plumtree was their advocacy for “child-centred” pedagogies. This type of pedagogy emphasised play, creativity, self-expression and non-hierarchical relations with children, and implicit “invisible” forms of control enacted through specific forms of talk (see Bernstein, 1975b). Adam, the chair of governors, was a key proponent of a variant of this pedagogy, centred on creativity, sports and “fun”<sup>56</sup>. He was a regular presence at the school, visiting the head generally at least once a week. A wealthy and prominent local businessman, he was a divisive figure both within the parental field and amongst staff because of the power he was perceived to wield at Plumtree. One critical parent said:

I think parents are beginning to resent him, because he is, I think he is very influential and he does talk about “my school,” which I think is quite dangerous, and he was one of the people who Meredith was aware of, she was kind of pushing away, and I don’t think Tom is that strong. He’s too sweet.

(Shona, Plumtree-Parent: IT3-11-04)

In relation to pedagogy, Adam explained that school was “not about learning facts but loving to learn; making learning fun” (Chair-of-Governors: FN16-06-04). As Bernstein pointed out, such “progressive” pedagogic modalities are seductive to the middle-class because for them “no strict line may be drawn between work and play” (1975b: 118). The emphasis on creativity and sports advocated by middle-class parents was seen by one teacher as potentially benefitting working-class pupils who would not normally have access to such activities.

It means that when parents fight for tennis, everybody enjoys tennis. When parents ask for sailing, the whole class goes sailing. So it means everyone benefits from it. And the children of working class families, they wouldn’t know that this is not what happens in – normally. They just say, “thank you very much”. And benefit from it.

(Yvette, Plumtree-Teacher: IT23-06-04)

Another teacher perceived that an over-emphasis on “fun” and non-academic aspects of schooling made pupils much more difficult to motivate and teach: “[The children] feel that they don’t have to do it [their academic work] if they don’t like it” (Estella, Plumtree-Teacher: IN28-06-05). This then had particular repercussions for TAs, who were largely expected to deal with precisely those children who were perceived to be most difficult to motivate.

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<sup>56</sup> The governing body itself was a significant mediator of social relations within the school.

Whilst indeed Adam's advocacy could be seen as an example of a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant audit- and target-driven discourse promulgated by policy makers, middle-class parents' support was contingent on the school being able to play both games successfully.

[Parents] feel very strongly ... that national curriculum or SATs isn't the be all and end all – if we had a drop in SATs [however], they'd be the first ones on our back about it.

(Tom, Plumtree-Head: IT21-02-05)

We had an Ofsted report which told us that we were good, now as somebody who runs a company that has won awards ... to hear that we are good is a criticism. ... I don't want us to be good, I want us to be *excellent*, and Tom shares our vision.

(Adam, Plumtree-Chair-of-Governors: IT3-11-04)

A practical consequence of the “fun” agenda throughout the school was the prioritisation of expressive arts and sporting activities, particularly within the Junior classes where the most observations were conducted: pupils regularly did sailing, guitar, art, Spanish, swimming, cricket, rugby, flamenco, tennis, athletics, choir, cycling and walking trips as well as additional activities relating to the “gifted and talented” programme organised by Peter. Whilst most white middle-class parents that I spoke to appeared to support Adam's pedagogic priorities, a few were critical of the agenda, in light of the diverse class backgrounds of pupils at the school:

I do think that there a group of Plumtree parents, who basically have had quite privileged lifestyles themselves, who are therefore into the whole let's all have a wonderful, kind of terribly unfettered, heavily child-centred, run-free type thing. And the assumption is that the kids will collect the sort of boring basic skills later. Well those kids will; because their parents will either pay for it, through a tutor, or they'll be able to provide it anyway. But some kids who could have benefited won't, because they won't have parents that can provide that level of input.

(Emily, Plumtree-Parent: IT8-11-04)

In a teaching environment already laden with constraints in terms of government-led curriculum, initiatives and targets, the scheduling and organisation of these activities was experienced as an unwelcome additional pressure on classroom teaching and learning activities by several teachers:

It is really hard with all the distractions in this school ... I do feel that some of the children that aren't so academic are missing a lot because of these things



... I only have one uninterrupted afternoon a week ... I feel like it's my time that's been taken away [laughs] ... I've got so much to do, and so much of the curriculum to teach, and some of these things aren't in the curriculum.

(Rachel, Plumtree-Teacher: IT17-11-04)

Assistants were also impacted, in that these activities tended to disrupt their classroom working patterns and relationships with the teachers they worked with. Depending on which group of pupils were involved in a specific extra-curricular activity, it tended to increase the time assistants spent outside of the classroom, further fragmenting their already nomadic work situation.

Classroom discipline was another important and problematic feature of assistants' and teachers' daily work experiences, and one which they perceived to be intimately connected to Tom's leadership style. It was a significant issue for assistants since they tended to work with pupils who regularly threatened teachers' classroom control. As Becker observed, a head's ability to project an image of "toughness" is a common expectation, particularly within an urban context where the cultural styles of some working-class pupils were perceived to pose an ever-present challenge to teachers' work situation and authority:

The amount of threat to authority, in the form of challenges to classroom control, appears to teachers to be directly related to the principal's strictness. Where he fails to act impressively "tough" the school has a restless atmosphere and control over pupils is difficult to attain. The opposite is true where the children know that the principal will support any action of a teacher. (Becker, 1953: 135)

The connections between discipline and headship at Plumtree were articulated in a number of ways. It seemed that Tom's presentation of self and his manner of handling disciplinary issues with pupils was not sufficiently "tough", and this confounded assistants' and teachers' expectations. Tom's more discursive style of discipline, reflecting his quiet demeanour, appeared to resonate with wider middle-class support for positive and non-hierarchical interactions between adults and children. Assistants and teachers therefore felt unsupported:

It's all to do with the way discipline is handled. It's ... not enough, basically. They let the kids get away with more than they should. The leeway is too much. It's the whole way it's done ... you have to be softly, softly approach now.

(Ruth, Plumtree-TA: IT12-04-04)

There used to be [strong discipline] but it's gone downhill ... [since] we changed heads. It's more like sit down and talk. The child's not listening to you ... soft touch, too much pep talk with the kids ... Now when you get sent to the head from here, you get [shrugs shoulder]: "you know what, send me to the head, I don't care. I know I ain't getting in trouble."

(Keisha, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04)

With very little by way of negative sanctions or a suitably intimidating head-figure, assistants felt acutely vulnerable and unsupported in relation to discipline. Andre recounted an example where the pupil he had responsibility for was engaging in dangerous behaviour, and Tom's response:

People do expect more support from Tom, and the situation with children, and so I had no support when it come to [X]. I do feel that I was isolated, I do feel when [X] is on the roof throwing stones at people, "It's okay, go back into class," like he just threw an apple at someone's head, they're injured ... But I'm following the head and the head's saying, "Keep an eye on him outside." And it got to a point where I said, "I'm not taking responsibility for him." It was total hands off.

(Andre, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

My observations found that classrooms in Plumtree were often very noisy, more so than at Greenvale. The fear of disapproval from middle-class parents in particular meant that there was a general reluctance amongst TAs and teachers to command children to be quiet or overtly control pupils' behaviour through directive talk such as that observed at Greenvale. Chloe and Ellie acknowledged that whilst as parents they had championed "self-expression" and laissez-faire forms of discipline, as workers their position was changing:

If you'd asked me a couple of years ago I'd have said, "Listen, these are young children, this is a small school, we should all be able to just talk and express ourselves. And the fact they don't know how to line up is because they're five years old." I'd have been much more liberal about it. And now I'm beginning to see that actually a quiet environment it makes it much easier and much less stressful.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT20-10-04)

I think there is a place for strictness and discipline rather than just reinforcement and encouragement ... I do think, generally in the school, a lot of it is carrot and there's no stick, and I think children have been getting away with murder.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT 27-01-05)

Tom's management of discipline in relation to pupils therefore came to symbolise for many an indifference to their daily classroom struggles, and his inability to establish a stable context for their work and interaction. This again diminished his authority amongst staff and reinforced an imminent sense of crisis of legitimacy regarding his leadership. The next section examines Bev's headship at Greenvale and the contrasting enactments of leadership style and negotiation of middle-class influence.

### **7.3.      *Negotiating colonisation at Greenvale: the contexts of Bev's headship***

In many ways Bev's headship demonstrates the themes of heads as "cultural founders", "owners" of their schools and "exemplars" as found in the work of Nias *et al.* (1989: 95-123). In contrast to Plumtree, Greenvale had experienced a long period of leadership continuity. Bev had been Greenvale's head for 15 years and during that period had lived locally, becoming a recognisable figure on the streets of Earlsdale. She spoke of the ingrained low expectations that she found when she took up what was then her second headship, in the early 1990s:

There weren't just low expectations on behalf of the staff, the children didn't expect much, and the parents didn't expect much ... So it took a long, long while ... actually getting people's trust, particularly in an area like this, where it's so disparate, I think is a long term thing.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

Her professional formation and leadership style seemed to have been deeply influenced by her class mobility from a working-class background in the north of England, and involvement in union politics as a lifelong member of the NUT. She recalled what Sennett (1993) refers to as the "hidden injuries" of class that her family experienced during her grammar school days; for example not being able to afford the uniform. She added:

So I don't want there to be a uniform [here] ... It was stupid and unconsidered, humiliations that I think I'll suffer forever. And that kind of colours your judgement. You don't want that to happen to other people. That's a bit of a driver.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

Her orientation toward headship was therefore personal and explicitly political. In the extract below, she can be seen to be grappling with the contradictions of urban schooling:

I think many people made the issues that inner-city children face ... if not excuses then they would give them as reasons, and it's not good enough, is it? That's not enough. Now, I can't eradicate poverty from a headteacher's office. It doesn't happen like that ... I think teaching is a political act. I don't think you could ever do it without understanding what it is that you're doing ... But I am suggesting that there is a huge amount that can be done to change the way that people look at their own expectations of how their lives will unfold. And it's up to us to equip them to be able to make choices. It's not good saying to children, "I want you to make the right choices in your grown up life" and then have them leave without being able to read. That's stupid. Because people who can't read very often can't make choices.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

Bev's account reveals the contradictions at the heart of urban primary schools as they were currently realised in Greenvale. On the one hand, whilst she located the problem of the inner-city as societally produced, she did not want the disadvantages suffered by pupils used as an excuse for their failure, providing a justification for the abdication of educators' professional duty of care. There was therefore a strong belief in the educational mission and the importance of leadership. According to Southworth, for some heads, "their work is simultaneously a matter of self-definition and self-expression. A head is literally and inextricably caught up in his/her work because the work is his/her self" (1995: 218). For Bev, this seemed to be very much the case. Bev's orientation towards the locality and working-class population can be seen clearly in the selection and recruitment of TAs at Greenvale. For her, TA work was part of a wider politics of empowerment. She saw urban leadership as furthering community development. Recruiting working-class TAs was part of the school's role as a *redistributive* neighbourhood institution. She explained her recruitment practices as follows:

[It's about] ... women coming back into employment. I spent time at home with my child when he was very young. And it was incredibly difficult, on an individual, personal level, to make the transition back into work ... And when I think that if you're coming back ... you might never have been in a workplace, or if you're coming back into the workplace and you've got no qualifications, everything's moved along, if you don't have a reasonable source of income, you can very easily get stuck to the point where you're not going to go back

outside the home again. And that isn't necessarily good for you and your family ... So people come and volunteer for a while, or people come and take a couple of weeks where they come in as meal supervisors, and then that grows ... and that improves things for people's families.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

These comments were typical of the way Bev's leadership was constantly grounded in her own experiences and identities; in this case, as a mother. There was a recognition that mothers were not equal in their capacity – in terms of qualification, skills, confidence – to engage with schooling and the world of work. Bev's construction of the urban school was that of an institution which could facilitate access to dominant forms of cultural and social capital for working-class families. Rather than being agents of social reproduction, schools should and could be spaces of transformation. Grace has argued that urban school leadership orientated towards working-class betterment has ideological appeal because "*it appears to offer a mode of working 'within the system' while at the same time encouraging critical opposition to it*" (Grace, 1978: 82). This is in contrast to Peter's notion at Plumtree that the middle-class should be encouraged to take on delegated leadership on the behalf of the working-class. There was however a tension, one which resurfaces throughout, between the undemocratic character of leadership and the opportunities available for others to participate in social change.

In recruiting assistants from the ranks of the working-class, Bev endowed the parental field with a different sensibility and gave value to experiences and resources that were in opposition to the dominant symbolic order. However, the intensification of gentrification during the fieldwork period was beginning to impact on the parental field. Bev viewed the changes with apprehension:

I think there's an interesting phenomenon going on now, because I think increasingly people are coming to schools and ... in my experience recently, people are coming to *our* school, when there's TA work around. And they're different. They're not straight out of the community. They're not working-class people. And they're coming to take on some of those roles. And I think we have to monitor that incredibly carefully. And it doesn't mean ... you wouldn't ever give a highly-qualified person a role ... But there's something underpinning what we've been able to do here ... I think we need to be careful to make sure that it's still open to everybody.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

Unlike Peter at Plumtree, who viewed assistant work as a way to actively elicit middle-class involvement, Bev's comments suggest a different ideological position, of alignment with the working-class fractions within the locality. For Bev the "community" referred to the working-class social groups within Earlsdale; gentrifiers were not perceived as members of that community. They were *in* the community but not *of* the community. For the time being, Bev's refusal to acknowledge the middle-class was a powerful statement of opposition. Without symbolic recognition, middle-class parents would find it difficult to "improve their position and to impose the principle of hierarchization most favourable to their own products" within the parental field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101). Bev's ideological orientation and construction of Greenvale as an urban school set a powerful context in which middle-class colonisation, or its potentialities, had to be negotiated. In the next section, I examine middle-class parents' perceptions of Bev and how this framed their engagement with the school.

### **7.3.1. Middle-class parents**

Bev's leadership style and presentation of self was direct and forceful. All the middle-class parents interviewed were well aware of her political views, motivations and investments. Amongst these parents opinions were polarised. One white middle-class mother, who had previously occupied a powerful position in the parental field as treasurer in the Parents' Committee, found her overt class politics and demeanour confrontational and alienating:

She's got a huge chip on her shoulder ... so that there are things that are personal to her that affect her work and her decisions that impact on her work, but they are personal to her. The school uniform thing ... She's quite open about that that was her reason for it ... My ideas were just not welcomed really ... Sometimes you were quite derided ... She would be quite rude to particular middle-class parents in the group, so, you know, it became "what I am doing this for" really [laughs].

(Abigail, Greenvale-Parent: IT8-06-05)

The centrality of the headship role to Bev's identity, in concert with her confrontational public style, made her appear adversarial. She was recognised as an astute and highly-skilled operator. Ball argues that "in the adversarial mode the assertion of control rests upon the skills of the head as an active politician and strategist both in the conduct of leadership ... [and] the use of talk" (1987: 106).

Another similarly-positioned parent acknowledged Bev's antagonistic attitudes towards middle-class parents, but framed this in relation to what she saw as Bev's legitimate concerns about middle-class dominance:

Oh yeah definitely, we've had our antagonistic moments over that and lots of people like me are extremely bugging, and they ring up and ... they are just all about their precious poppets ... and I see that Bev and her staff are not running this school extremely well [just] to support precious poppets, they really want to give everybody a chance ... and yeah, I suppose I try to put the good side to everybody of Bev, and there are people like me who will do lots of great things for the school, who are very committed and aren't too precious. It's a funny old business, I don't know, I can see that it's a really valid concern [of hers].

(Arabella, Greenvale-Parent: IT19-05-05)

The above extract highlights the ambivalence with which Bev was viewed by middle-class parents at large, even amongst those who were generally supportive like Arabella. Bev did little to suppress her irritation with some middle-class parents and their "precious poppets" and this bluntness did not endear her to this faction. Parental involvement appeared to be very much on the terms determined by Bev. In contrast to the autonomy afforded to active middle-class parents within the parental field at Plumtree, Bev seemed to have made a concerted effort to limit the power of the Parents' Committee to mobilise and take independent action. This was reflected in her regular attendance at their meetings and close monitoring of their activities. She also attempted to influence the composition of the committee and encourage more ethnic minority and working-class parents to participate, although she admitted this had been largely unsuccessful: "The Parents' Committee is still almost exclusively white. And that's a bit unshiftable [sic]. I can't – we can't seem to make that difference" (Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05).

Bev's leadership style and dealings with middle-class parents communicated a clear sense of boundaries. Further, middle-class parental involvement itself was not valued in the same way as at Plumtree; doing "lots of great things for the school" did not result in greater deference or acceptance. Bev appeared to disrupt the dominant implicit understandings that middle-class parental involvement was always welcomed and should be encouraged. This refusal to symbolically recognise and valorise middle-class

parents' contributions had been a source of frustration for Abigail during her time as treasurer:

I really don't think they know how to get people involved and how to welcome somebody who is, after all offering them a service, into the school.

(Abigail, Greenvale-Parent: IT8-0605)

It is interesting also to note the expectation implicit in Abigail's comments, that parental involvement was part of a marketised exchange that should lead to greater responsiveness to parental perspectives in return for "service". Bev's account of her relationship with middle-class suggests that her uncompromising attitude towards the white middle-class must be viewed within the context of her own accrued symbolic capital, as head of a *successful* school.

just because I'm very old and I've been around forever and actually there's not much people can do to me ... It means that I have the luxury of being able to be very direct in a way that 10 years ago I didn't have, because I wasn't in that position yet.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

As Bev points out, the "luxury" of being "direct" was simply was not available to her previously, when the school was struggling. This highlights the importance of the contexts, history and settings in which headship is realised. At Plumtree, Tom's headship was interwoven with other factors which made it very difficult for him to assert himself in this way. Moreover, as suggested in chapter 5, the middle-classes in Earlsdale during the period covered by the fieldwork appeared more willing to defer symbolic control of the locality to working-class groups whom they perceived as "authentically" belonging to it. In contrast, Tom was negotiating his headship in relation to more hegemonic middle-class that could be mobilised. Bev's directness meant that even powerfully-positioned white middle-class parents were highly conscious of the limits placed on their capacity to act and shape the agenda at Greenvale, and for the time being it seemed that they were willing to uphold the status quo:

She's got very firm ideas about how the school should be run, I don't think there is a lot of flexibility for any suggestions to be taken on board really, because it runs very well as it is, you know, and if it's not broken, why do you need to fix it.

(Imogen, Greenvale-Parent: IT26-05-05)



In meeting the wider challenges presented by middle-class parents in relation to her headship, Bev had managed “to achieve and maintain particular definitions of the school over and against alternative, assertive definition” (Ball, 1987: 278). This provided symbolic capital, which she was able to utilise in relation to the negotiation of relations with internal audiences of assistants and teachers.

### **7.3.2. Institutional perspectives**

Bev was a highly visible and mobile head. Her leadership style seemed focused on cultivating relationships and talking to staff. Ball observed that this style of leadership “makes certain demands on the incumbent in terms of social skills. The emphasis on the ‘the personal’ requires an authenticity and facility in social interaction. A great deal is done through ‘talk’” (1987: 94). Bev displayed a remarkable level of expressive control and subtlety in her presentation of self within situated interaction rituals. As one teacher summarised: “she knows when it needs to be formal and when it’s got to be informal” (Adelaide, Greenvale-Teacher: IT22-06-05). Her attention to the performative seemed exemplary and was part of her repertoire as head: “I think she’s good at reading characters, Bev, so I think she treats each person according to what she wants to get out of them” (Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05). She was seen as highly driven, with a clear vision and high expectations of all staff. Several informants talked about her being “fair”. She had a demonstrated commitment to the children and the locality, reflected in the longevity of her headship and the enhanced reputation of the school. She was also viewed as a “fighter” for the school’s cause: “She’s certainly fought, she’s got a lot of pennies, you know, she’s fought for money to get things working” (Lillian, Greenvale-TA: IT21-02-05).

There was also an overwhelming impression from assistants and teachers that as well as the positives her leadership style could at times be domineering, abrasive and authoritarian. Interactions with Bev could also generate a certain amount of anxiety as illustrated in the following extracts:

I think she’s a very warm person, really ... She is a hard taskmaster, she wants total commitment from her staff. She’s very driven. She’s got a lot of excellent qualities but she’s not very charismatic. But she’s terrific in other ways.

(Lillian, Greenvale-TA: IT21-02-05)

[Leadership is] ... very strong. And I think if you want to – [pause] you either have to be a person that is always strong and can kind of bite back, or, in my case, I have to feel that I'm one hundred per cent certain of whatever it is I'm saying before I'll have a confrontation.

(Michelle, Greenvale-LM: IT17-03-05)

Whilst Bev was the most visible and powerful figure of leadership, others such as Owen the deputy and Hazel the SEN coordinator were very much seen as part of the school leadership. Moreover, they were viewed as providing much-needed foils to Bev's assertive and domineering leadership style, as the following extracts show:

Owen is quite often more relaxed about things ... Sometimes it's bit like good cop bad cop, to be really honest ... They are really quite different.

(Erica, Greenvale-Teacher: IT19-05-05)

[Hazel] doesn't like to belittle people or feel that she is doing that. But then – whereas Bev doesn't care and I don't think she realises that she's doing it, which is very difficult for the running of the school in terms of communication skills and management. I mean, it can actually really wind people up. And Owen is probably quite good at diffusing that, I think, in his hilarious manner.

(Lillian, Greenvale-TA: IT21-02-05)

As documented in this section, the legitimacy of Bev's leadership among staff was well-established. Her headship was realised through a highly-effective leadership style which commanded recognition and deference from staff. In contrast to Tom, Bev's power to define key aspects of the institutional reality for others, as I show below, enabled her to provide a stable and settled context for educational work and assistants' and teachers' pedagogic roles.

### **7.3.3. Pedagogy: teaching and discipline**

In contrast with the pedagogic priorities at Plumtree, Greenvale practices were biased towards the “explicit” spectrum and focused on the transmission of core academic and social competences, with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships commonly seen in urban schools (Connolly, 1998).

We are not social workers, but ... I don't think you could teach in this school, in this borough ... and not take any notice of what goes on at home for those kids ... if I thought I was just coming in to just teach and go home, I don't think any teachers do here, I couldn't do it, you know what I mean, because it

isn't just about "oh here is my learning intention for the day" ... it's about relationships.

(Erica, Greenvale-Teacher: IT 19-05-05)

However, there was a similar (if less extensive) range of extra-curricular activities provided for pupils, including music, dance, art, pottery, gardening<sup>57</sup>. These though were timetabled less intrusively and therefore did not disrupt classroom teaching activities. Most importantly, the provision of these additional opportunities for children was not perceived as emanating from the parental field, but instead viewed as a legitimate expression of the school's ethos. Bev did however acknowledge that within the context of increasing middle-class interest in Greenvale, her intention in providing these activities could be misconstrued:

We didn't provide violin classes so that more middle-class kids would come here. We provided violin classes so that the kids in our school would learn violin. It's pretty straight forward. The fact that it appeals to middle class people is neither here nor there as far as I'm concerned.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

Rather than a response to middle-class parental demands, Bev saw the provision of enrichment activities as part of the school's commitment to offering diverse cultural and social opportunities to working-class pupils. Extra-curricular activities were therefore not viewed as an external imposition, nor were they a source of friction and grievance as in Plumtree. They were claimed as authentically expressive of Greenvale's values.

In relation to discipline, I observed that teachers and TAs exerted control in more explicit and overt ways in their interactions with pupils than was the case at Plumtree. They did not appear reluctant or afraid to assert themselves. Whilst my observations and informants' accounts indicate that discipline and maintaining classroom order was a daily challenge faced by all concerned at Greenvale, this was not perceived as deeply problematic or a reflection on the leadership. Bev was seen as highly supportive in this regard, and responsive to staff expectations of "toughness". Also, in contrast to Plumtree, there appeared to be more of a sense of shared responsibility for discipline. This is illustrated in an example provided by Yolanda:

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<sup>57</sup> Some of these were run by assistants, whereas at Plumtree, they tended to be run by external providers.

We all support each other in whatever way we can ... everybody does for everybody. And that's all there is to it. And if you can't do it for them then you find someone who can. So it's like, you may have a difficult kid in one class, yeah, and I'm not meant to be in that class, because I'm with year six. But I'm not gonna watch a teacher struggle with a child, and say, "Well, I can't go there because I'm only meant to be with year six." No, I will go in there and I will help.

(Yolanda, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05)

As indicated in the above extract, the way disciplinary problems were dealt with was viewed in a positive light. Unlike at Plumtree, assistants felt supported by the authority of the head, and able to act and assert themselves in such situations. This reflects the fact that educational work at Greenvale seemed to be relatively insulated from the penetration of middle-class mobilisation and power from the locality. This is not say that assistants and teachers did not face challenges to the organisation of their work, as they did at Plumtree, but rather their experiences were framed by a stable and settled institutional context of meanings, largely provided by Bev's headship, ideological orientations, and enactments of leadership style.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has addressed a number of key themes in relation to the organisation of assistants' classroom work and the role of headship in determining the context of educational work, particularly in reference to processes of class colonisation within urban schools. The first part of the chapter considered how factors such as temporal and spatial constraints, and teachers' practices, expectations and authoritative roles within the interaction order shaped the contours of assistants' experiences of their work situation. Existing research on TA-teacher interactions has found that teachers "made it clear that they were 'the boss' in the classroom and had difficulty sharing control" (Rueda and Monzó, 2002: 516). Similarly, Weiss suggests that within the classroom it was "the aide who must acquiesce and adjust her behaviour to suit a teacher's demands" (1994: 340). This chapter supports these broad findings and also highlights the role of gender, showing that expectations embedded within the classroom were highly gendered and resonated with female dispositions of care manifested in the feminine habitus. This created strong pressures for female assistants

to take an expansive orientation to their role, which resulted in various forms of exploitation (e.g. unpaid work inside and outside of school).

This chapter also attended to assistants' pupil focus and wider classroom processes of stratification. The analysis suggests that to solely focus on assistants' sociocultural mediations within the classroom may be to miss a more basic function which their presence serves in these schools. Assistants appear to facilitate and contribute to classroom processes of differentiation and structuration between learners. Teachers viewed their contributions as largely pertaining to their responsibility for "problem" children, who posed a threat to the authority structures of the classroom or their professional experience and competence.

The heads of Greenvale and Plumtree were significant actors in the field of power, able to shape the parental field as well as institutional realities through their actions and enactments of leadership style. They were under enormous pressures to provide idealised dramatic realisations of their positions, in particular displays of "toughness" and assertiveness. Unlike other staff, heads' position at the apex of the authority structure in primary schools meant that their presentation of self was constantly exposed to scrutiny. Ball observed that heads are "caught between audiences, and the demands those audiences make may be very different and are often contradictory and irreconcilable" (1987: 86). The findings of this chapter show how what might seem to be formally identical positions of authority can be realised in such dramaturgically different ways, in different contexts, and with such contrasting outcomes. Goffman noted:

A status, a position, a social space is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well-articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is none the less something that must be realised. (1969/1990: 81)

In the case of Plumtree, the precedent set by Peter's encouragement of middle-class mobilisation and the legacy of Meredith, coupled with Tom's relative inexperience and specific professional formation, all contributed to a challenging context in which Tom had to establish his legitimacy. His leadership style and presentation of self – diffident and hesitant – seemed to empower middle-class action within the school. Within this

context, figures such as Adam, the chair of governors, came to exert considerable influence in the school, impinging on the pedagogic roles of staff.

In relation to staff, Tom's seeming deference to parents and inability to protect the work situation of teachers and assistants from "interference" impacted on the way he was perceived, and contributed to what was a crisis of legitimacy. Insofar as he was deemed to be ineffective in his wielding of the power invested in his role, his authority was eroded. This resulted in frustration, anger and other negative emotions and left many staff feeling vulnerable and uncertain about the operations of power. In failing to meet staff expectations in relation to parents and pupils, Tom's credibility and symbolic power as a head was severely diminished. Gabriel suggests that within an organisation, "subordinates often make superhuman demands on their leaders" (Gabriel, 1997: 315). Yet the messy compromises and constraints under which Tom's headship was realised reinforced the sense of disappointment felt by staff:

Discovering that the leader is not omnipotent undermines his/her perceived capacity to protect the subordinates and to stand up for them. The leader's weakness makes the followers feel vulnerable and exposed. More importantly, it makes them feel betrayed, as if the messiah has turned out to be an impostor. (Gabriel, 1997: 330)

At Greenvale, the contexts of Bev's headship were very different. The school had experienced continuity through the longevity of her headship, and she had accrued capital from the demonstrated success of the school. Further, her headship was realised through an effective dramatization of leadership style that displayed high levels of expressive control within interaction rituals. Equally, middle-class colonisation was less assertive at Greenvale, reflecting the wider ambivalent orientations of the middle-class towards Earlsdale. As suggested in chapter 5, middle-class groups in Northwick were more likely to mobilise as a class in relation to their hegemonic constructions of the locality. Thus Bev was able to realise and defend ideologically-driven possibilities of headship at Greenvale with relatively less opposition, and in so doing was better able to meet the expectations of assistants and teachers. Bev's leadership had therefore succeeded in providing a settled context for educational work at Greenvale.

The analysis presented here suggests that colonisation by the middle-classes is a complex and variegated process, which is significantly shaped by heads and their

leadership styles. The impact of middle-class mobilisation in relation to staff's institutional perspectives is rarely documented. At Plumtree, middle-class intervention was experienced as traumatic, disruptive and emotionally draining by the majority of staff. It was experienced differently at Greenvale, where Bev's leadership style provided a robust defence of headship power in relation to middle-class assertion. These findings from both schools contrast with the characterisations of headship provided by Butler and Robson in their discussion of the role of the Frank Whittle Primary school in the gentrification of Telegraph Hill (2001); they appear to suggest that the head was supportive and played a significant role in middle-class colonisation. They write that: the head was an "important source of information and advice in devising strategies and options for children's secondary" schooling (2001: 82). This chapter documented a more ambivalent role for heads under conditions of colonisation. Whilst Bev could be seen to be oppositional toward class-colonisation, Tom's response shows that history, context, and the head's own professional formation play a key role in how colonisation is negotiated.

There were also interesting contrasts of gender. Plumtree was led by a *male* head, who was perceived as being weak and ineffective. His presentation of self and cultural style was often read and interpreted within interactions as "feminine", and therefore disparaged. In contrast, Greenvale was led by a *female* head who was perceived as strong and confrontational, embodying in some contexts a stereotypical masculine leadership style. This suggests that headship has to be negotiated in relation to wider dominant constructions of gender and leadership (Strachan, 1999).

This chapter also highlighted the importance of head's ideological orientations in framing assistant work. In both schools, offering employment opportunities to parents and other individuals within the locality was seen as an important symbolic practice and a way to reshape the boundaries of power, and relations between home and school. As we saw, for Peter, TA work provided a mechanism through which middle-class self-interest could be socialised and harnessed for the common good. This revealed a faith in the principles of market rationality to produce better/morally good outcomes, rather than a zero-sum game in which "one group's educational success can be seen to harm the prospects of other groups" (Reay, 2004a: 539). In essence, the notion was that facilitating colonisation would result in an improved school. Bev's ideological

orientations expressed a different understanding of the class relations of urban schools. For her, urban schools were pedagogic agents of transformation and empowerment, and providing TA work to members of the local community could contribute towards that role. She asserted the power of the school, and thereby of heads, to define the collective good, which in this case was determined to the benefit of the working-class. This commitment to working-class empowerment was found amongst the heads studied by Pratt-Adams and Maguire (2009), who tended to be from working-class and/or minority backgrounds, like Bev.

The role of deputies as part of school leadership was also documented. At Greenvale, Owen's role as deputy appeared to offer an alternative leadership style which counteracted Bev's more dominating style; at Plumtree, Peter was seen largely in the same light as Tom, which in view of the dissatisfaction with his leadership merely compounded the sense of crisis. Staff at Plumtree appeared unable to maintain control over their work situation and continually struggled to establish a working environment amenable to the realisation of their professional practice and duties. In contrast, at Greenvale, assistants and teachers seemed to have experienced a more stable and satisfactory classroom context, shielded from conflicting outside influences.

In the next chapter, the focus moves to the reproduction of formal structures of institutional power and their negotiation by working-class and middle-class assistants. Interaction rituals within formal meetings are used as lens through which to examine the formation of assistants' occupational voice/s and the maintenance of control and solidarity by heads. Headship resurfaces again as an important theme, in mediating the opportunities available for assistant action and voice. Class and other differences amongst assistants are also highlighted.



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## Chapter 8 – Formal Structures: Voice, Representation and Power

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[Meetings are] ... ritual affairs, tribal gatherings in which the faithful reaffirm solidarity and warring factions engage in verbal battles. ... When in doubt call a meeting. When one meeting isn't enough, schedule another. (Boden, 1994: 82)

This chapter explores assistants' positioning within the formal structures of power and their negotiation of opportunities to participate and act. Specifically, this is examined in relation to staff meetings. Formal meetings arose within the fieldwork as an important aspect of TAs' experience of institutional power: both in terms of assistants' interactions within them, and the position of the meetings themselves in the political structures of the schools. As highlighted in chapter 2, assistants are frequently marginalised or excluded from mainstream lines of communication and institutional gatherings such as meetings (Bartlett, 2003; Rueda and Monzó, 2002). Meetings represent a context where members of an institution or community come together to define and represent their experiences and identities (Schwartzman, 1989), and as such are important and contested sites of identity expression, group formation and *voice*. In its literal sense, voice represents the speech and perspectives of the speaker; politically, a commitment to voice "attests to the *right* of speaking and being represented" (Britzman, 1989: 146).

Meetings as successful, recurrent interaction rituals can be the foundation of solidarity, investing cultural and group identities with emotions and symbolic content. The interpersonal realities of a meeting become "a vehicle for the reading as well as validation of social relations within a cultural system" (Schwartzman, 1989: 41). Meetings, therefore, enable us to examine the intersectional articulations of the various boundary-making processes of institutional life, such as those between the informal/formal, TAs and teachers, intra- and extra-school contexts. By focusing on what TAs as workers in these settings can/cannot say, do/not do, share, initiate, decide and become through staff meetings, we can gain a better understanding of the positions TAs occupy within the institutional order of schools and the way class processes inflect and infuse these realities.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: first, TAs' experiences and participation in formal support staff meetings at Plumtree are considered. The same parallel description is undertaken for Greenvale, before an analysis of intra-/inter-institutional themes of power, identity and solidarity across both schools. Of importance throughout is the continuing significance of the theme of leadership style, in this case, responding to and mediating the actions of TAs in meetings, as well as organising the contexts in which meetings can take place. I also explicate the processes and contexts which inform the development of assistants' institutional voice and action within the formal structures of power.

### **8.1. *Support staff meetings at Plumtree: the struggle for voice***

The establishment and organisation of a meeting for support staff was a problematic and contentious issue at Plumtree and reflected the extent to which TAs had to struggle for voice. During most of the school year 2003-2004, there were seldom any formal support staff meetings, although Peter (the deputy) and the Tom (the head) had agreed to them in principle. Anthea said that the overwhelming opinion had been that: "all the TAs should have a meeting at least once a month, if not more" (Plumtree-TA: IT13-10-04). It was indicated that these should be "management" meetings. The desire for a "management" meeting conveyed TAs' attempts to emulate and claim the *right* to voice which they saw granted to teachers. In this, TAs, were attempting to activate the latent right as subordinates to make claims through the institutional structures to be heard.

In the same way that the [teaching] staff, when they have their meetings once a week, I think it's a really good chance for everyone to talk about what's been going on, you know, say if they've got any issues, and I think it's a really good opportunity to talk about, you know, specific children.

(Anthea, Plumtree-TA: IT12-05-04)

As Anthea's comments suggest, the *right* of teachers to have a meeting was never in doubt, it was simply assumed. The meetings were also perceived as being important in addressing the limited opportunities for TAs to meet and share ideas, and remedying the poor communication and information exchange between TAs and senior management: "I think things aren't always passed down from senior management, between teaching and TAs ... I would say that there is a gap between what's passed

down from the top” (Leah, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04). Assistants wanted to be fully included within the formal communicative structures as they saw them: “I mean you do hear things via the grapevine sort of thing, but largely we didn’t have any management meetings ... we never got to find out anything, we found out from somebody else” (Kirsten, Plumtree-TA: IT8-10-04).

At the start of fieldwork in 2004, most TAs reported they were unsure of how many meetings had taken place that year or if, in fact, *any* had occurred. It was generally believed that the institution of a regular meeting for support staff had failed. A number of reasons were suggested as to why:

I don’t know if it’s ’cos ... the [teaching] staff don’t want us to go out – I don’t know. Or whether ’cos sometimes Tom’s not here, or Peter’s not here ... We have had a few more than we had last year, but not that many more, not – it’s not done regularly enough, I don’t think. It should somehow be done on more of a regular basis.

(Lucia, Plumtree-TA: IT19-05-04)

Lucia’s comments highlight the perception that teachers on the whole were unsupportive of the TAs’ meetings. Teachers relied on assistants’ support, particularly in relation to “difficult” pupils, and might have found it difficult to cope in their absence. Further, as previously mentioned, teachers already considered their work time prone to disruption by extra-curricular activities and might have perceived a TA meeting as another undesired interruption to their routines.

Another factor was the availability of senior leadership (i.e. either Tom or Peter). Given that the meetings were intended to involve them, their absence generally resulted in a cancellation. At the start of the new 2004-2005 school year, TAs sought assurances that meetings would be more frequent and that they would be properly administered and timetabled. The subject had by this time become a source of grievance and friction between TAs and senior management. A weekly slot, during a morning assembly (thus minimising disruption to teachers’ classroom routines) was agreed upon. However, not all TAs could attend since some started work later. At the beginning of term, the first meeting was cancelled. I then observed the next timetabled meeting.

TAs are gathered in the staffroom, waiting for a member of senior management to start the meeting.

Lucia: They are both downstairs [referring to Tom and Peter].

Ruth: Take note Ayo, all the staff are here and we are still waiting.

After waiting a few minutes, Ruth decides to go downstairs to find either Tom or Peter to see what is causing the delay. The mood is steadily becoming more annoyed and exasperated. Ruth returns.

Ruth: He'll be sending us a letter to tell us what the meeting was going to be about. He's being held up by some parents [somewhat sardonically].

Collette: I told you. Nothing new. Didn't I tell you? This always happens.

Kirsten: It's the second time he hasn't bothered to turn up, we know how important we are [sarcastic tone].

The TAs have waited for almost twenty minutes. They are deeply frustrated and annoyed. Several mutter that "it has been a waste of time," Everyone returns to their classroom disgruntled.

(Support Staff Meeting, Plumtree: FN16-09-04)

As the exchanges between TAs demonstrate, this particular cancellation was interpreted in light of previous experiences of failed meetings. It had become part of the accumulated history of grievances and perceived managerial indifference towards them as an occupational group within the school. Tom's relayed message to the assembled TAs that he would "tell them what the meeting was going to be about" in a letter suggests that, for senior management, the meeting was perceived as a forum for one-way *transmission* which could in principle be substituted by a letter. In contrast, TAs wanted to use the meetings as a forum in which to express their voices and have an input into decision-making, as well as for information sharing.

Tom and Peter's frequent absences from the support staff meetings would come to be a persistent theme in the struggle for voice at Plumtree. Ruth's sardonic comment regarding the reason for Tom's absence, being "held up by some parents" also signalled the perception amongst some TAs that he seemed to prioritise middle-class parents' needs above those of staff. Further, since Tom was not able to extricate himself from parents on this occasion, he again appeared weak and submissive, and unable to manage parents' claims on his time: "Since Tom has been in here, [parents] are in and out all the time. I mean ... if they're not in and out talking to him, they're on the phone to him or they're e-mailing him" (Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-01-04). The promised letter or agenda from Tom on this occasion did not ever materialise, and

following this incident a number of subsequent meetings were cancelled. Motivation for the meetings soon began to dwindle again. The lack of shared interaction rituals and opportunities to communicate left grievances unacknowledged and encouraged a sense of uncertainty, distance and division between assistants and management:

I do often feel that our opinions haven't been counted in the past, and there is a bit of a them and us ... More senior management and us, although we are supposed to have these termly meetings ... They are a waste of time.

(Amanda, Plumtree-TA: IT13-10-04)

It was indicative of their infrequent nature that Amanda referred to them as “termly” meetings, even though they were intended as weekly events. The failure to organise regular meetings eventually led TAs to begin to renegotiate their social status, through redefining the meaning and purpose of these meetings; in particular, what was to be done in light of Tom and Peter’s frequent absence. Ellie and Chloe increasingly assumed an informal leadership role within these meetings becoming significant mediators of TAs’ collective voice. For these women, there was a classed history incorporated in the habitus of confidence, active participation and voice in various arenas such as the parental field (see §6.2.1). For example, Ellie had been a union representative in her previous career whilst Chloe had been on the management committee of her children’s nursery. Also, both women were active members of the Parents’ Committee. They saw value and potential in the formation and development of voice within the meetings in the absence of senior management:

it was always worthwhile, because to have a group session, sometimes without the senior management there, it was very good to get our thoughts clear. And once or twice we actually wrote notes afterwards and passed them on to senior management because points came up that needed clarifying. So, yeah, those meetings are always valuable and a good chance for people to say what they’re not happy about, you know, in a way they wouldn’t say if there was a senior management representative there.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

As Ellie’s comments indicate, the presence of management could prove inhibiting and constrain assistants’ participation as subordinates. Having assistants-only meetings removed the asymmetric authority relations between senior management as order-givers and TAs as order-takers. Instead, it seemed that such occasions enabled TAs to step out of the established cognitive and authority interaction rituals of deference in

which they were positioned within classroom settings. They provided opportunities for TAs to get their “thoughts clear”.

Despite these attempts to reconfigure the support staff meetings and make them less dependent on Tom or Peter’s presence, the *unpredictability* of their attendance remained a source of frustration. Thus, even when the meetings did go ahead, there was often a sense of disappointment, which generated feelings of distance and alienation from them as leadership figures.

And I would say out of the, you know, potential fifteen to eighteen meetings, Tom or Peter have shown up to maybe five or six of them. Sometimes they just don’t come at all ... I think we just sometimes felt like we didn’t know whether a meeting would be with or without somebody [from senior management] there.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

Tom and Peter’s continued absence underlined the *precarious* position of TAs’ meetings and thus of their limited opportunities for voice and significant involvement in decision making processes.

The meetings carried on in an infrequent manner until the January term of 2005, when the teaching staff and senior management decided, without consulting TAs, to discontinue the assemblies which had supported both management and TAs’ attendance. This decision was taken by teachers within their own weekly meetings:

I mean, without any thought that that assembly enabled him to meet regularly with the support staff, they just, well, the teachers said, “This assembly is a waste of time,” you know, “we’ve got three other assemblies, we don’t want that assembly.” So the assembly went and suddenly the time for a support staff meeting went.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

Another attempt was made to reinstate the meetings, and they were rescheduled by Tom as fortnightly events. Again, assistants appeared to face resistance from teachers who did not want them to be out of the classroom:

So we started having support staff meetings on Thursday mornings, but the teachers were all waiting for us to come down for – to begin our, you know, support staff duties. So it was very, very difficult to have a meeting at this time.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

Teachers' actions served to undermine trust and the development of solidarity across occupational roles. The disorganisation and the failings of the meetings were made apparent again near the end of fieldwork, when the implementation of the government's remodelling agenda became a priority. As indicated in chapter 1 (see §1.2) *workforce remodelling* agenda held significant consequences for TAs' and teachers' division of labour in terms of new expanded roles, job descriptions and responsibilities. There appeared to be very little awareness of the policy overall, particularly amongst TAs, and teachers also. Assistants had very few opportunities to discuss the proposed changes, and little understanding of what the policy was or what it would mean for their work. All the main decisions seemed to have been outside of assistants' meetings. As Ellie told me:

We don't know what's in them [the new job descriptions] yet ... As far as workforce remodelling goes, people – it feels like either it's the calm before the storm, or maybe it will just all work out. But it doesn't feel as though we've really had any input or anything has been explained clearly. I mean, it feels as though it's just – it's gonna be a wait and see thing. We have asked for assurances that we won't be put in a position that we are taking the whole class without agreement or without payment. And we have been reassured that that won't happen, but who knows? It just feels like nothing is really clear. What will it be like on the first day of the first week of next term [in the new school year]? I just don't know.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

The job descriptions failed to materialise before the end of school year. Experiences such as these demonstrated to TAs their institutionally disadvantaged position. For most TAs, enthusiasm for the meetings cooled. Although they continued to be held they were increasingly seen as tangential to the negotiation of any substantive concerns and problems. One TA, Amanda, suggested that rather than fighting for more regular TA meetings, perhaps they should simply attend teachers' meetings. This was not a possibility raised by any other of the TAs that I spoke to<sup>58</sup>. To do so, Amanda acknowledged, would be to disrupt the established institutional order and the social relations between assistants and teachers which underlined it:

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<sup>58</sup> Amanda was in a transitional position, having been a TA for several years at Plumtree, she had recently finished a part-time degree and was embarking on a Graduate Teaching Programme (GTP) at the school during the fieldwork. Thus her role was blurred, as she moved from being a TA to a teacher trainee. This might explain why more than any other TA, she raised this possibility, as her on-going formation was increasingly aligned with those of a teacher.

Nobody has actually [said] we are allowed to go, although we were never allowed to go before. Not, not allowed, but it just wasn't done. I hear that "yes you are welcome to come," but I think, I don't know, you go in a room and there's a staff meeting on and everything shuts up [laughs], so that would probably change things if we went to staff meetings.

(Amanda, Plumtree-TA: IT13-11-04)

For some TAs, notably Chloe and Ellie, there were opportunities for institutional action and power elsewhere in the forums of the governing body. Before going on to document this different arena and its associated meetings, I will briefly consider Tom's perspective and responses in relation to the staff meetings.

### **8.1.1. Tom's perspective on the meetings**

Whilst it would be impossible to fully account for Tom's absence at each of the support staff meetings, my observations suggest the time at which they were held was a particular issue for him. It tended to be in the morning just after the formal start of the school day, when parents were likely to still be in the school building. They often used this opportunity to seek out members of the senior leadership. Further, Tom had an open door policy, which meant that given the location of his shared office with Peter, opposite the main school office, it was relatively easy for parents to find him and meet him without appointments. Thus, it could be said that, in part, Tom's absence from the support staff meetings appeared to be connected to his reluctance to exert any back and frontstage control to his office.

Tom's own accounts indicate that he was aware of the intensity of feeling which the disorganisation and frequent cancellation of the meetings with TAs aroused. During our interview, he described a recent occasion where he had failed to attend a timetabled meeting because of an unplanned meeting with a parent:

You know, they all sat there waiting for me, but no one bothered to use their initiative and say, "Well, is there a reason Tom's not turned up for this?" And grumble, grumble, grumble. And then actually it was break time before I managed to speak to people to let them know "this is the reason," "Oh no, it was ok", but I'd already picked up on the ... you know, [makes whingeing sound] "we don't value these meetings, type of thing." Well, it's not a case of that, and there are things, that I can't always be there every [week] – or, if I'm not there or Peter's not there, have your meeting; there is an agenda about



things that you can talk about. Go ahead. Don't just sit there like, you know, lemons, with it.

(Tom, Plumtree-Head: IT21-02-05)

Tom's account suggests that he had a different conception of what the meetings were about and the significance of senior management presence within them. He seemed to suggest that his presence was not necessary for the meeting to occur, and for assistants to demand this showed a lack of initiative on their part. His comments appeared to minimize the importance of his own role as head, in endowing the meetings with a sense of institutional legitimacy and forging solidarities. Further, in categorising TAs' criticisms as "grumbles", imitating "whingeing" noises, Tom denied their legitimacy. This was a specifically gendered code of derision<sup>59</sup>. Both Tom and Peter were highly conscious of the gender and authority asymmetry between the management at Plumtree and TAs.

It's a responsibility that you have to make sure that you don't use your gender as a management tool ... To be aware that we are men and not to use that role inappropriately, that is something we are always aware of.

(Peter, Plumtree-Deputy: IT21-02-05)

Yet, in light of the stereotypical feminine ideals which permeated teachers' and others' expectations of TAs' role and behaviour, as highlighted in the previous chapter, it was quite likely that these attitudes would impact on those contemplating action. As Collinson explains:

Those seeking to discipline subordinates and colleagues frequently seek to dismiss their resistance by imputing negative motives. So, for example, derogatory labels or identities such as "trouble-maker," "whinger," "chip on their shoulder" ... frequently have symbolic and disciplinary impact on those considering resistance. (1994: 179)

The alignment of role expectations embedded in TA work with wider societal constructions of women as submissive acted as a constraint on expressions of voice: "It's a gender thing as well, you know, they are these two men on their thrones and you feel like a complaining woman" (Ellie, Plumtree-TA: FN11-01-05).

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<sup>59</sup> Andre and Paul, the two male TAs at Plumtree did not frequently attend meetings.

### 8.1.2. Social divisions and habitus

As indicated already, Ellie and Chloe assumed commanding roles within the support staff meetings, and as I show here, sought opportunities for further involvement and influence. For Chloe this resulted in election to the governing body as a “support staff” governor. As a result of Ellie’s dominant position within the parental field, she was acquainted with several of the key figures on the governing body such as Adam, the chair of governors<sup>60</sup>. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in relation to pedagogy, Adam was a divisive and powerful mediating agent between the governing body, the school and the parental field. As a result of their social capital middle-class TAs were presented with opportunities for discreet political interventions that were not available to others:

I never know who to go to, if I go to Peter, Tom might think that I am going behind his back and because my son plays with the son of the chair of governors I know him quite well. And I think that perhaps I could say something to him over a glass of wine.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: FN11-01-05)

It was clear that Tom and Peter were aware of such instances, and considered them *illegitimate* forms of communication: “Tom and I are not silly, we do know who says what and to whom” [laughs] (Peter, Plumtree-Deputy: IT21-02-05). In contrast, vocal white middle-class parents perceived such informal channels of communications as vital and *legitimate*, as Amy explained:

I think they [assistants] contribute enormously, I mean, a lot of them are parents, and they do provide a link between school and other parents, you know, if there are things going on, you hear about it from them rather the teachers.

(Amy, Plumtree-Parent: IT9-11-04)

Other middle-class parents were more ambivalent:

It’s almost too local you tend to hear about everything, it’s a fine line ... Sometimes you think that it would be better if there was professional line drawn between the staff and the parents but sometimes they are the same people.

(Susan, Plumtree-Parent: IT1-11-04)

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<sup>60</sup> See previous chapter (§7.2.3) for more background information on his influence at the school.

These close articulations of the intra- and extra-institutional contexts presented these TAs with a deep sense of ambiguity and potential for confusion regarding situated identities and information flows.

For most working-class TAs, seeking election to the governing body was not perceived as an appealing prospect. It was a forum that most were unfamiliar with in terms of their experiences of participation in structures of power. Most assistants, much like working-class parents, did not have the material or cultural resources that would facilitate participation as governors (Crozier, 1999). Several had other jobs in the evening or caring and domestic responsibilities at the time when governing body meetings were held.

For Chloe, however, the governing board meeting as an interaction ritual was instantly *recognisable*; its composition, the types of people on it, their backgrounds, the protocols and procedures of the meetings, and the mode of interaction and the speech codes were intelligible to her. She had the material and cultural resources and embodied dispositions which would be recognised in such an elite forum. As Ellie commented: “Chloe is very articulate, she’s really forthright, she’s just the sort of person you need” (Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05).

As a governor Chloe had an explicitly *political* role and stake in the school and its management. The governing body was an arena where her social and cultural capital was recognised, and she could adopt a high-status situated identity by virtue of her habitus. She felt equal and able to express voice, not because the governing board made her equal, but because she was among her social equals.

I think that sort of committee, governing board, thing is quite daunting. I mean, I read the Guardian, I’m white, middle class, you know, I feel quite guilty sitting there thinking, “God, I hate people like me”. And, we do have a mouth, you know, we do – I don’t mind saying stuff, they don’t mind saying stuff.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Having an additional role as support staff governor brought about a change in Chloe’s relations with senior management, namely Tom, and opportunities for the expression of voice. As she explained:

I just feel that the governing thing has made me feel empowered, that I can go to him now and I can say – and I’m not *just a TA* but I’m now [a] support staff

governor. And so I can now knock on his door and say, “Did you know that there’s,” you know, “people are upset because of this,” or something. I feel that I’ve got *more of a voice now*. So, yes, so that’s a good thing. I just don’t know if I’d feel that way if I wasn’t on the [governing] board.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Although she was clearly emboldened, my observations suggested that Chloe’s role as representative made little or no difference to the work situation of most TAs. Instead her involvement appeared to reinforce the cultural and social distance between these middle-class women and other assistants. There was a perceived division between more vocal middle-class TAs and working-class TAs who tended to adopt a quietist political stance. For several of the working-class TAs, middle-class TAs’ domination of the formal structures of collective voice and representation was experienced as discordant. They were perceived as often overly critical, and many of their grievances were considered to emanate from their *parental* interests. Their expressions of voice were therefore often perceived as *illegitimate* expressions of TA voice: “you see the ones with the children in the school, they are the first ones to complain, they are the first to moan, ‘ah this is not being done and that’s not being done’” (Keisha, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04). Their dominating presence was experienced by several working-class TAs as alienating. As Ruth explained:

It’s like in this school you’ve got the bottom group [of parents] and then you’ve got these high flying ones, doctors, barristers, who think they are above everyone else ... The lady that you interviewed at lunch. [Ayo: Kirsten] ... She’s more of that group ... The ones that have just come, don’t know how to put it, they’re different from me, Lucia, Esma, Estella, Yvette, Sue in the office, who’ve all been here a long time [pauses] basically they think that they are better than us, I would put it that way.

(Ruth, Plumtree-TA: FN8-10-04)

For Ruth, institutional solidarities were constructed on the basis of longevity and shared history and position in the locality. In her account, institutional membership included teachers who had been at Plumtree a long time, admin staff as well as working-class assistants. This was contrasted with the relatively recent presence of middle-class TAs, whom she identified with their position amongst the dominant middle-class fractions within the parental field, the “high flyers”. Ruth’s comments highlight some of the social, cultural and symbolic divisions between staff in the school.

Middle-class TAs also recognised that they formed a social and cultural group, who “all have similar involvements and backgrounds” rooted in their identities as parents and mothers (Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05). Ellie conceded that there were tensions between her identities as *parent* and *worker*: “It does get harder, actually, the longer you work here. There is – there is a divide between staff and parents, but when you’re both you, kind of, you can really see it” (Plumtree-TA: IT20-10-04). Further, in light of their own participation in the political structures within the school, these TAs saw working-class distance and disengagement as acquiescent and accommodating:

I think they’re disadvantaged, firstly because they’re, I think, often less educated. I think, you know, there’s a few people here who just don’t – they just take their lot, they just get on with it ... And it works fine but it’s unfortunate because they should be, I don’t know, taking more, they should be getting more, and there should be more support.

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

In the next section I turn to Greenvale, where staff meetings offered different opportunities to participate and act within institutional structures.

## **8.2. Support staff meetings at Greenvale**

At Greenvale, there was an established weekly TA meeting that was very well attended. The meetings were held during lesson time and teachers were generally supportive of TAs’ attendance. The meeting was convened by one or more senior staff; in most cases, either Bev, the head, or Owen, the deputy, or another member of the senior leadership team. On the occasions I attended, all or most of the senior management were present. Their regular attendance gave the meetings an organisational legitimacy which was lacking at Plumtree. Unlike at Plumtree, support staff meetings were an accepted and validated aspect of the school’s negotiated order. They served several functions for the TAs who attended, including information exchange, as well as providing opportunities for voice:

At least I can know what’s going on outside of my own classroom, what else is happening in the school, things that is going on, what outside activities are going on, activities at lunch time, who is dealing with what. It’s helpful.

(Phoebe, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

Another talked about the meetings as spaces where TAs’ active participation in decision-making processes could be activated: “some teaching assistants – we’ve had

ideas, and they've been put into practice in the school" (Lauren, Greenvale-TA: IT4-03-05). The meetings contributed to TAs feeling involved. In addition, they were an important evocation of Greenvale's staff culture. Interactions were relatively informal, although more formal than in non-meeting rituals. There was, as with all communal settings and interactions within Greenvale, plenty of humour. Jocular relations<sup>61</sup> between key figures, such as Owen the deputy and several of the TAs, attenuated power relations between senior management and TAs, moderating the impact of Bev's forceful cultural style and expression. Bev's speech in meetings seemed inclusive and the preponderance of the pronoun 'we' in such settings indexed her concern with facilitating cohesion and consensus. Bev's highly informal mode of speech, and its working-class register and inflections, appeared to successfully bridge the status hierarchy between management and worker and reiterated the normative value of "plain speaking" within Greenvale staff culture. For Bev and other members of the senior leadership, these meetings were focused on fostering commitment and institutional solidarities through talk. However, despite the informality of these meetings, and the often jocular mode in which they were conducted, some TAs still felt they could be repressive in terms of expressing dissent.

I think they happen a bit quick, you know. Maybe we should have an agenda or be asked to bring something to the agenda that we may want to discuss. We do get asked at the end, "Is there any questions?" but it's like, by that point no one wants to say nothing, everyone just wants to go or to stop, you know.

(Justin, Greenvale-TA: IT17-03-05)

I'd find it like they [the senior management] – it used to be difficult to talk to them. In the meetings I'd find it, in here, it was just me telling if there is any problem to [be] brought it up in the meetings. And [Bev] used to shut me up. I find the people – the [support] staff wouldn't support you. Like they'd support you when the management's not around, say, "Go for it," say, "do it," And when you'd do it in the meeting, they wouldn't open their mouth and support you where you can win the cases. Because I know at least two or three of them supported me.

(Bahar, Greenvale-TA: IT28-02-05)

These comments suggest that for some, their experience of these meetings was akin to a power ritual, based on an institutionally-sanctioned asymmetry in interactional resources between order-takers and order-givers. Bev's leadership style, authoritarian

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<sup>61</sup> The next chapter considers the role of humour in shaping Greenvale's workplace culture.

and at turns adversarial, presented challenges to assistants contemplating expressing voice within these meetings. As Phoebe elaborated:

you can feel [at the meetings] that if there is something that is not quite right or you don't ... find that you are pleased with you can bring it there or any other matters. *But you are still wary*, because it's your headteacher, you are still wary on how you address things ... 'cos I don't feel I'm very, I don't feel that I could really. I can more bring my problems to Hazel<sup>62</sup>, than take it to Bev, and Owen I find is alright. In general if I do have problems its Hazel I would take it to.

(Phoebe, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-30-05)

Within meetings, Bev tended to use her authority to exert interactional control. This was done through setting the pace and duration of the meetings, and controlling over the order in which topics were discussed. The lack of a formal agenda could also be used to suppress dissent or debate. For example there was not enough time allocated for items introduced by TAs themselves, because by then as Justin observed, "everyone just wants to go or to stop". Bev's confident demeanour and use of interruption was also part of her cultural style. Owens and Sutton (1999: 310) note that interruption is a common strategy amongst high-status individuals in meetings, which tends to be met with deference (mostly silence) by those lower down in the organisational hierarchy.

Bev's presentation of self and its impact on TAs' capacity to act within support staff meetings can be seen in the fieldnote extract below. The extract is taken from a meeting where new job descriptions were being discussed in preparation for the implementation of *workforce remodelling*. The school had recently received a generic specimen job description from the Local Authority, which Bev had amended, without consultation. She was presenting the modified version for the first time to garner TAs' views:

Bev hands out copies of the proposed new job descriptions. She explains that UNISON have not had a look at it yet, but she feels that there is nothing particularly contentious about it. She says that the original version from the local authority was four pages long, and had tasks on it which she did not feel were appropriate for her staff. This is her revised version. She adds that it is much more representative and "respectful" of what TAs actually do in Greenvale.

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<sup>62</sup> Hazel was a part of the senior leadership team.

Bev: I mean, if you have a look [holding the job description], there isn't anything that you are not doing already.

Yolanda: Lot more writing in this one, compared to our old ones.

Bev: Well that was pretty ancient; it had things like washing paint pots and cleaning windows.

Gail: Yeah, it's true, washing and tidying. I remember [laughs].

Bev: No, I am not being serious about the windows [smiles]. But the [LA] have got tidying in their job description but I didn't feel it was something I wanted in your job description. Hopefully, the job has moved a lot further on than that ... . You know, you are not being paid to tidy up or clean, if there is obviously some extra tidying up to be done, then you'll get extra hours for that, but, if you see something that needs tidying, you are not going to just leave it, but you know what I mean ... . Because you know, tidying up is what being human is about.

Several TAs ask questions, clarification and revisions are suggested. These will be written into the version to be sent off to UNISON.

(Support Staff Meeting, Greenvale: FN18-04-05)

We can see how the "line" Bev takes within this interaction develops; that is to say, how the patterns of talk and non-verbal cues through which she expresses her authoritative definition of the situation interact with others' actions (Goffman, 1967/2005). Bev's demeanour was relaxed, reasonable and direct, and peppered with humour. Her knowledge and involvement in union politics for over two decades validated her support of workers' rights. It suggested that the interests of "workers" were aligned with those of management. Bev's revision of the LA job specification was presented as a benign bureaucratic set of amendments rather than the political intervention it was. She presented the issue in a manner which mobilised support for her managerial position, by ridiculing and parodying the local authority's position. This generated humour, an energising emotional force that appeared to reinforce the situational identification of those present with the managerial position. Equally, we can see that TAs were not given the opportunity to view the original nor preview the amended version. This restricted their capacity to review and comment on the job specification within the interaction. Again, this worked to Bev's advantage in securing a consensus. She was able to frame the issue of shifts in roles/responsibilities as synonymous with the specific task of "tidying". Whereas in fact this could be seen as a more significant and problematic issue about the division of labour between TAs and



teachers (Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997b). In re-framing the issue as a relatively trivial matter, and making light of the rewording and removal of “tidying”, Bev at the same time indicated that the generalised expectations that TAs would undertake such tasks would not change. This extract highlights how conflicts were typically negotiated and dissipated through support staff meetings, generally expressing the managerial agenda. It was indicative of Bev’s leadership style in which “there is an absence of structure, procedures and methods – just the person and power of the head” (Ball, 1987: 93). Another example was provided by Bahar. She was one of the more vocal assistants. Bahar told me she had sought to be a union representative since no else wanted the post but at the “last minute”, on the occasion of the vote, “the management brought in that person”, another candidate, and she was side-lined (Greenvale-TA: IT28-02-05). As Bahar saw it, the manner in which this was done, and the way support from other assistants was mobilised for this other individual, led her to believe that it was the result of deliberate machinations by “senior management”. However, she recognised “there is no proof” (IT28-02-05)”. Bahar’s experiences highlight the undemocratic facets of Bev’s leadership style, which could lead some assistants to view decision-making as an “elusive and mysterious process, as inaccessible, taking place out of sight” (Ball, 1987: 92) and that what was important were “the deals done behind closed doors, the *ad hoc* agreements and negotiations or representations made in private” (Ball, 1987: 116).

We have seen thus far the very different experiences of the institutional landscapes and political structures at Greenvale and Plumtree. It is on these contrasting themes that the chapter concludes.

## **Conclusions**

As my analysis highlights, support staff meetings were an important mediation of TAs’ occupational status and voice. They provided the main, official and legitimated institutional mechanisms for information exchange, involvement in decision-making processes, and the articulation and expression of *collective* voice and identities. For the majority of TAs, the support staff meetings were the most important one in their working lives.

The failure at Plumtree to institute a regular support staff meeting intensified problematic social relations between assistants and senior leadership, and a perception of teachers as being unsupportive of their participation. It was an *ironic* consequence of the balance of power between TAs and teachers that many of the decisions which impacted on the arrangement of their meetings and general working life were made within teachers' own meetings. This is consistent with findings from the two schools studied by Rueda and Monzó where they reported that "paraeducators and teachers attended separate meetings and workshops, even when topics affected both" (2002: 517).

As several scholars have argued, it is the very act of voicing issues in meetings that transforms them from personal dissatisfactions or just "gossip" or "grumbles", into recognisable organisational codes and forms of address, into items on an agenda or topics for discussion (Owens and Sutton, 1999; Schwartzman, 1987). Meetings enable criticisms to be aired and presented as legitimate, "framed" as organisational "business". They allow organisations to reconcile the informal and formal aspects of working life (Schwartzman, 1987). Without a collective sphere that assistants perceived as legitimated, in which issues could be frequently raised, they remained positioned as individual concerns. When meetings did take place at Plumtree, they were viewed as largely irrelevant to the settlement of grievances and criticisms. This increased the likelihood that assistants would seek alternative, often backstage and covert, forms of action and mediation. This is highlighted in the extracts below:

To be honest, I don't have much to do with senior management ... I wouldn't necessarily go to them; I would prefer to go to someone closer.

(Leah, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04)

If you need something done, you might as well do it yourself, go directly to the person.

(Keisha, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04)

The failure of the meetings encouraged a distrust of formal structures and the procedural mechanisms through which claims for readdress could be made. In addition, by missing opportunities to enact his leadership within support staff meetings, Tom reinforced the impression that he was distanced from, and indifferent to, the work situation of assistants. The result, as the two comments above indicate, was that he was not seen as a figure who *could* resolve or reconcile institutional conflicts. This

further eroded his legitimacy and symbolic authority in assistants' eyes and engendered a cynicism, particularly amongst working-class assistants who appeared most alienated from the formal structures of power.

In contrast, at Greenvale, the right to representation was established and supported by senior management and teachers, in terms of time and space and the attendance of key staff. This meant that TAs felt they occupied an informed and legitimated position within the school's political structures. However, Bev's leadership style, its confrontational and authoritarian modes, as well as her social acuity, made dissent or challenge to the authority structures very difficult and unlikely. For Bev, the focus of these meetings was maintaining control and solidarity, such that although in principle the TAs had a voice, in practice they sometimes felt unable to exercise it. In *neither* school were the assistants' meetings a substantive arena of decision-making power; the general perception among TAs was that key decisions were made elsewhere and the evidence suggests that this was indeed the case.

Furthermore, I examined how middle-class power came to penetrate the formal institutional order within Plumtree, and the part played by middle-class assistants. I suggested that middle-class assistants' identities and solidarities in the parental field shaped their involved participation in the political structures of power. At times, their social capital provided them with alternative sources of information and opportunities for action, thereby rendering institutional barriers permeable to further inspection and mobilisation. Their relatively powerful positioning established flows of communication and other informational resources to the parental field, which generated micro-political problems for leadership, and further eroded Tom and Peter's ability to manage and control the conditions of educational work at Plumtree. These assistants' participation generated a conflicted and confused context for the expression of their institutional voice, which in turn alienated them from their working-class colleagues. Whilst Chloe and Ellie did advance some issues of common interest (e.g. staff grievances regarding poor communication, deployment and the organisation of training), their identities as *parents* often undermined the legitimacy of their actions. The more embedded within the structures of power these assistants became, the greater the social distance between them and working-class TAs. As Bernstein observed, the exercise of power tends to create dislocations in the social space, which

“create boundaries, legitimise boundaries, reproduce boundaries, between different categories of groups, gender, class and race, between different categories of discourse, different categories of agents” (2000: 5).

This chapter has revealed the complex and differentiated positions held by TAs in the formal structures of schools, the role of their class habitus, and the critical role of leadership in mediating institutional participation and experiences. The analysis has shown that while some have opportunities to realise powerful identities and actions, others are marginalised and have their voices suppressed. The final empirical chapter that follows examines how TAs’ different positions within the formal institutional structures described here are transposed and re-constituted in the informal domain. The focus will be on assistants’ experiences of, and contributions to, the form and content of the informal workplace culture or symbolic order of these schools. It is an enquiry into the social, symbolic and cultural bonds which bind the (potentially unstable) institutional order in the context of class colonisation.

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## Chapter 9 – Informal Structures: Workplace Culture

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Workplace cultures revolve around the shared values and attitudes and the shared experiences that validate them. A culture includes everything that is learned and shared by its members: its social heritage and rules of behaviour, its own customs and traditions, jargon and stories. (Smircich, 1983: 339)

In this chapter, I focus on informal workplace culture and TAs' experiences of, and contributions to, its form and symbolic content. This represents the final empirical tracing and specification – in terms of ontological layering of the various dimensions of social realities examined – of neighbourhood formations as they are reconstituted within the institutional domain. It also addresses questions of power and ideology in these urban educational settings.

A substantial part of the empirical analysis presented focuses on staffroom interaction rituals. School staffrooms have long been of interest to educational ethnographers (e.g. Ball, 1987). As Paechter notes:

school staffrooms are ... spatially very interesting places. Mapping these rooms, noting who sits where, with whom, and why, can give important insights into the prevailing power relations within a school at any particular time. (2004: 34)

A key theme is humour and its contribution to the characterisation of workplace culture. Humour generates an emotional response/mood and, as argued in chapter 2, emotional dynamics are an important and transformational aspect of the ritual process underpinning the generation of social bonds. Humour has a number of dimensions: it is emotionally productive (Cooper, 2008), and has symbolic content which can be used in talk and interaction. It played an important role in both schools' workplace cultural expression.

The exposition of the main themes is structured in the following way: first, I detail the workplace culture of Greenvale and the significance of humour within it. Humorous talk reveals Greenvale staff culture to be ideologically and emotionally charged with an ambiguous grounding in working-class symbolic forms, which facilitate enactments of resistance and subversion of class and other forms of oppression. This allows for a

continually-iterated and fluid cultural topography which draws from, but is not identical to, neighbourhood working-class cultures. My analysis also highlights the role of leadership in the construction of this workplace culture. This is then followed by a presentation of the contrasting enactments of workplace culture at Plumtree. I demonstrate that the cultural landscape at Plumtree was more differentiated, truncated and fragmented, and TAs' position within it more complex and problematic, than was the case with Greenvale. Plumtree's workplace culture was fractious and divided, with fewer shared motivating institutional solidarities and identifications. I suggest that this was intimately connected to the deeper penetration of middle-class colonisation within the social and cultural fabric of the school.

### **9.1. The staffroom at Greenvale I: workers' playtime**

The staffroom at Greenvale was located in a discrete and discreet space. Difficult to locate for a newcomer, it was visually and aurally screened-off from the main staircase and corridors. Pupils were only permitted to enter with special permission. The restriction of access facilitated the experience of it as a peculiarly *adult* space for staff. There were two main areas; a kitchen and a dining area<sup>63</sup>. The dining table was the core socialising area and another larger section was arranged with low-rise padded chairs. This area seemed to afford more privacy; interactions in this zone were less communal, and TAs and teachers appeared to prefer this area for work-related conversations and quieter pursuits (e.g. reading).

Spending time in the kitchen area was generally perceived as an invitation to social interaction. The lunch-time breaks were the most important and longest of the day. A majority of staff made an appearance during this period, however brief. Staff at Greenvale preferred to eat with each other, where possible, because they valued and enjoyed the social exchanges<sup>64</sup>. Relative to classroom spaces and their more regulated interaction rituals, it was a classic "backstage" region. The dramaturgic transition as assistants and teachers entered the room was often visible and audible. It was a space where TAs and teachers could let off steam. This was apparent in changes to TAs' and

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<sup>63</sup> By the side of the kitchen was a discreet entrance to the female staff toilets. The predominance of women on the staff and the location of the female toilets in the staffroom increased opportunities for social interaction.

<sup>64</sup> I noted however, that there was an implicit deference sometimes observed to teachers by TAs if the dining table was crowded.

teachers' language and demeanour; staffroom talk was loud, bawdy and much more direct, and more inflected with the (working) classed speech codes of assistants' and teachers' habitus in comparison to classroom talk. As Agnes said to me: "No children are allowed in the staffroom, especially the way we talk [laughs]" (Greenvale-TA: FN4-11-04). Several of the TAs told me that the social interaction between TAs and teachers was a source of enjoyment and satisfaction at work and this was principally due to its humorous character:

there's loads of fun. You just – I think, to be honest, to be happy in your work, you've got to have a laugh. If you don't ... have a laugh and you don't enjoy it, then there's no point in doing it.

(Gail, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

Humour was a recurrent mode of communication and interaction within the staffroom. It was a strong feature of interpersonal exchanges amongst all categories of people within the school (e.g. teacher-pupil, teacher-TA etc.). In the staffroom, humour mediated relations amongst teachers and, importantly, between TAs and teachers. Humour attenuated power differences, allowing both teachers and TAs to interact as persons rather than unequal role occupants. Teachers and TAs alike suggested that humour and laughter was a part of "their" culture, grounded in the shared experience of the demands and pressures of working at Greenvale. It was seen as a useful coping strategy:

people can have a joke, and a giggle, and a smile, find something to laugh about, that's our way of working in a tough environment but you've got to feel comfortable with people to do that, people aren't going around fearful, to do that.

(Stuart, Greenvale-Teacher: IT28-04-05)

The production of humorous discourse, as well as relieving stress and tension, as reported by some assistants and teachers, was *valued* within social interaction. Therefore, the competence and creative use of humour within Greenvale's cultural scene was a form of cultural and symbolic capital. As I came to realise during the fieldwork, humour was an institutional resource which circulated through the informal/formal hierarchies and symbolic economy of the school.

### **9.1.1. Having a laugh**

Jocular interactions amongst staff, although initially bewildering to an observer, were highly patterned. Firstly, I noted that there were key agents, some TAs and some teachers, who I will collectively refer to as “jokers”. They appeared to play the role of “organisational fools” within situated interactions in the staffroom. Much like a court jester, the “organisational fool” is an unofficial (but sanctioned) position which enables certain people to deploy humour to critique or lampoon aspects of the organisational culture (Kets de Vries, 1990). At Greenvale, to be a “joker” was to be a person who could be reliably expected to initiate or engage in jocular banter. Their cultural styles and expressive repertoire tended to engender further comic and humorous iterations, drawing other staff members into the fold. It was thus a form of institutional cultural power that could foster solidarity – as well as division and social control – through changes to others’ experiential mood.

The prominent jokers were: amongst assistants, Gail, Agnes and Yolanda; amongst the teachers, Dave, Erica, and Owen, the deputy head. There was an interplay of similarity and difference in their cultural styles which was used in the construction and negotiation of humorous encounters. Erica and Dave were romantic partners, which added a playful, domestic twist to their interactions. Erica was from a similar Earlsdale working-class background to Yolanda, Gail and Agnes. All four women had noticeable working-class London accents and were known for their ribald sense of humour, and Gail was noted for her loud cackling laugh. Dave was a sarcastic and sardonic character with a pronounced Northern Irish accent. Often an instigator of humour in most communal settings, he was a widely-respected teacher and enjoyed a particular repartee with Gail. Owen was also a jovial figure but occupied a more ambiguous position, which was connected to his role as part of the senior leadership team.

A significant feature for this analysis of the humour in the staffroom is that it frequently involved and evoked class cultural symbols. Gail’s working-class London accent and vernacular was a source of good-natured teasing, particularly from Dave. Equally, Dave’s identification as an Irish Catholic who grew up in segregated Belfast allowed him to position himself in opposition to certain aspects of English middle-class cultural



symbols. This can be clearly seen in the extract below, which is typical of banter that I observed in the staffroom:

Context: Gail has gone into the fridge to get a sandwich.

Gail (TA):       Who's responsible for the fridge [turns toward the table],  
                          something bloody stinks in 'ere?

Erica (Teacher): I think Dave is supposed to be responsible for the milk.

[Gail turns towards Dave and glares disapprovingly]

Dave (Teacher): Two words Gail, 4 letters, begins with F, and 3 letters  
                          beginning with O.

Gail (TA):       Fuck off Dave!

Dave (Teacher): [laughs] You wouldn't guess it would you, that her interests  
                          are medieval anthropological history and horse riding  
                          [affecting an exaggerated *English* middle-class accent].

Gail (TA):       [Affects a middle-class accent] Yes, horse riding, don't you  
                          know.

Mocking role play continues for a while.

(Staffroom: FN5-10-04)

The exchange begins as a minor everyday conflict, which is then managed and diffused through humour. There was a kitchen rota amongst staff for cleaning and the monitoring of perishable items. Gail's initial outburst is not directed at Dave, and it is Erica who implies that Dave is "responsible for the stink". This represents a potential loss of face for Dave, particularly in light of Gail's subordinate organisational status as a TA. Therefore, in order to maintain his integrity in the interaction, he makes a pithy and *offensive* remark, in a thinly-disguised linguistic form; what sociolinguists, after Goffman, refer to as a "face-attack" (Holmes, 2000). Gail retaliates with a more direct "fuck off Dave", removing any latent ambiguity in their exchange. What follows is indicative of how staff often managed everyday micro-conflicts and affirmed solidarity. Dave's response marks a shift in the character of the talk. Their confrontation is re-contextualised on a humorous plane in a manner that is familiar to both of them. The humour becomes a shared resource which actually reinforces group affiliation through the ritual process (i.e. shared focus of attention and mood, and the emotional entrainment the interaction demands). The fantastical elements of Dave's comments ("medieval anthropological history") and their ironic juxtaposition enable him to assert a distance between himself – and Gail – and an imagined English middle-class culture.

The role-play functions as “a discourse strategy which distances the speaker from the person whose words are ‘quoted’, thus emphasizing boundaries between the speaker and the butt of the parody” (Holmes and Marra, 2002b: 79). Thus the humour is shared, and it is the values and attitudes represented that are implicitly criticised. In this and other examples I observed in the staffroom, humour provided “an ideal vehicle for collaborative verbal behaviour” and appeared to promote solidarity amongst staff (Holmes and Marra, 2002a: 1688). As Holmes comments:

shared humour emphasises common ground and shared norms. A successful attempt at humour indicates that the speaker shares with others a common view about what is amusing – creating or maintaining solidarity, while enhancing the speaker’s status within the group. (2000: 167)

This analysis resonates with Woods’ (1983) observation that humour in the staffroom has a *levelling* effect. Humorous banter was a form of public interaction ritual which demonstrated to audience members that talk was not risky and unpredictable, and in which participants could display their competence and capital. It is emblematic of how humour can “integrate and differentiate groups that in some way are aligned against each other” (1983: 119). Humour provided a significant mediation of class and occupational tensions.

In the following extract, we see how the position of joker is enacted and the use of stories as forms of symbolic representation in the narration of Greenvale workplace culture.

I go to the staffroom to eat my lunch. I sit at the table. Dave begins to tell an anecdote. Apparently it is for my benefit. The attention is focused on him, there is quiet. As he begins, there are nods of acknowledgement, exclamations, “oh yeah, I remember her,” Clearly, this is not the first time this story has been told. The anecdote is about a female supply teacher who used to work at the school. Dave adopts the screech of an upper-class English lady’s accent as he mimics her mannerisms. There are smiles all around. There is an ethnically-diverse mix of staff around the table, including Owen, the deputy, as well as TAs. The caricature suggests she had little understanding of the children at Greenvale. Dave continues: “then, one hot day in the staffroom she said, ‘oh my, terribly hot isn’t it’ and there was a black male teacher who was here at the time, who she turned to and said, ‘why yes, I guess you are used to this type of weather’ to which he replied, ‘no, not really, I’m from Milton Keynes’”. Everyone laughs uproariously.

(Staffroom: FN8-09-04)

Why did Dave decide to tell this anecdote? At the time I was perplexed, just a week or so into the fieldwork. In retrospect, it was clearly a gesture of inclusion, an invitation to share and participate vicariously in the staff culture. Clearly, the anecdote had been told before, and it seemed to have a somewhat “mythical” quality. Its veracity seemed unimportant. The importance of such situated rituals were the moods they produced, the symbols which they charged with emotional energy, and ultimately the forms of solidarity they generated. It also communicated a knowing acceptance of my presence in the staffroom, and thereby, permission to conduct fieldwork. Such moments highlighted the ambiguity and the unsettled nature of the fieldwork process and the way that issues of “consent” had to be negotiated through opportunities such as these. My response, in joining in the laughter (if somewhat less enthusiastically) also indicated my then intuitive, understanding of this fact.

The supply teacher in Dave’s narrative was obviously a caricature. Of significance was what she represented; a certain *white middle-class* presentation of self and cultural style. The anecdote utilises the familiar tropes within staffroom talk of irony and role-play. It relished her “putting in her foot in it”, mocking her racial stereotyping of a black teacher. The narrative then was about her undoing and, therefore, the undoing of her white middle-class values and assumptions. This signalled that she did not understand either the inner-city, or Greenvale. Her failure was a symbolic celebration of the Greenvale staff’s own heroic, anti-racist working-class selves (real and imagined). It was about the drawing of boundaries between those who *just* work there and those who in some sense “belong” to Greenvale, those who identify with and understand its culture and pupils, and implicitly that of Earlsdale. It was a representation of the workplace culture as related to working-class culture in general, and the lived experience of Earlsdale in particular. As an interaction ritual, it was thus a vivid celebration and evocation of the pleasures and virtues of experience and subjectivity within the staffroom. In such moments, a sense of togetherness could be experienced.

In the next section I highlight the importance of swearing, which has been an unremarked-upon feature of some of the extracts discussed so far. Swearing, perhaps more clearly than other features of talk, reveals assistants and teachers’ understandings of the symbolic location of the school.

### 9.1.2. A touch of class

Swearing was a striking feature of speech within the staffroom and other backstage regions within Greenvale. As the previous extracts have highlighted, social interactions within the staffroom were often peppered with expletives. Swearing, as researchers Baruch and Jenkins (2007) suggest, can function within organisations as a “relief mechanism”, a way of venting frustrations and relieving stress. In addition, they suggest that swearing in the workplace can also be used conversationally “to help define interpersonal relationships” signifying group identity and membership (Baruch and Jenkins, 2007: 497). My analysis suggests that the permissive attitude towards swearing in the staffroom was emblematic of Greenvale’s orientation towards a symbolisation of working-class cultural values such as: plain speaking, directness, and self-expression. Rather than being constructed as offensive and inappropriate within the professional domain of a primary school, swearing seemed to be an accepted aspect of informal social interactions particularly when accompanied by humour (Daly *et al.*, 2004). In the following fieldnote extract, I illustrate the integral and *unremarkable* use of profanities.

Dave (Teacher): Aren’t you supposed to be on [playground] duty today Yolanda? [looks at the rota on the wall]

Yolanda (TA): Nah! Not today. [looks at the rota] It’s – Oh, Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! I got it wrong, I’m on duty. [Hurriedly drinks cup of tea]

Dave (Teacher): Yeah, [peers through the window], I think I can see, what’s that, is that Faye breaking up a fight on her own. [laughing] ... If you are lucky, you might get there on time to ring the bell. [laughs]

Yolanda (TA): Oh stop it, Dave. [hurriedly finishes her tea and speeds downstairs to indeed ring the bell.]

(Staffroom, Greenvale: FN16-03-05)

In the above scenario, Yolanda’s swearing signifies her annoyance at her own forgetfulness and the embarrassing situation in which it positioned her. She was using it primarily as a marker, for emotional emphasis. Although Dave does not reprimand Yolanda for her mistake, he gently chides her through his conjured scenario of another TA, Faye, struggling by herself, whilst Yolanda is in the staffroom drinking tea. The swearing, much like the laughter which accompanied it, mediates the interpersonal relationship between the two, and reveals the extent to which they were conversant in

the cultural forms of Greenvale's workplace culture. As Daly *et al.* argue, knowing when swearing is appropriate within the workplace, "typically requires extensive understanding of the cultural norms and values of the community of practice involved" (2004: 961).

Greenvale staff members' permissive attitude toward swearing was an aspect of Bev's leadership style, her perceived authenticity. As Owen told me:

You go to lots of staffrooms and you have teachers sitting on one side and the TAs sitting on another side, and they don't really mix, that level of mixing doesn't really happen, you don't get the deputy head in the staffroom, you don't get the head in the staffroom, and I don't think the school is like that at all, I think everybody mixes with everybody else ... these are real people, that's the space to relax, we are all a bit foul-mouthed in this school [laughs] in one way or another. From Bev downwards, I guess that's who we are. She sets the ethos.

(Owen, Greenvale-Deputy: IT25-05-05)

Owen's account of social interactions in the staffroom, the role of swearing ("we are all a bit foul-mouthed in this school"), and Bev's leadership style highlights a number of points in relation to key themes in the analysis of institutional experiences at Greenvale. Importantly, it reiterates the influence of Bev's leadership style in setting the cultural tone and symbolic parameters of workplace interaction through her own embodied cultural capital and presentation of self. Her own use of expletives set an example for staff regarding what was permissible and implicitly the value such expressions conveyed. This emphasised the distinctive nature of Greenvale's staffroom or informal talk, highlighting an orientation towards an imagined working-class culture concretised in the locality.

Evans' (2007) ethnography of class identities in south London is helpful in this regard. She shows that what it means to be a certain kind of working-class woman can involve a celebration of plain speaking, swearing, not speaking "proper", and knowing how to "ave a laugh" at home and at work. For some of her informants, being "common" means: "having none of the obsessive modesty of prudish politeness. ... [It is] about having a particular relationship to the question of what counts in polite society as good manners and it is a relationship of opposition" (2007: 24). It is an opposition to pretension, and middle-class notions of feminine "respectability" (Skeggs, 1997), which

cast working-class speech, comportment, lewdness and use of profanity as deviant and other in the symbolic class economy of value. In creating a fluid space for the expression and embodiment of working-class cultural styles, including swearing, Bev was actively inverting this hierarchy of value. This positioned Greenvale staff culture as somewhat subversive in relation to some middle-class cultural capital, values and forms of expression. As Baruch and Jenkins suggest, swearing can be emotionally energising because it is taboo, and “swearing is considered powerful because it challenges ... societal class codes” of appropriateness and politeness (2007: 495). Thus, it would appear that Bev’s leadership drew some of its symbolic power from its homologous articulations with the perceived vitality of transgressive working-class forms. The next section shows how the workplace culture characterised thus far supported collegiate relations amongst staff.

## **9.2.      *The staffroom at Greenvale II: workers’ refuge***

The staffroom was not only a space for laughter and fun. It was also a space where difficult and serious issues were discussed; where TAs and teachers came together to talk and discuss their understandings of pupils, and of what they constructed as the violent social maelstrom that lay outside the school gates. Thus shared knowledge and understandings were developed. Sometimes these conversations were spurred by current affairs or media reporting about educational disadvantage or violence in London. Often they were prompted by the immediate experiences of living and working in Earlsdale. Greenvale’s articulation and embeddedness within the local structure was evident.

A number of tragic and serious incidents occurred during my fieldwork at Greenvale which highlight the ways in which staff coped and developed their understandings of neighbourhood. A former pupil of the school, a black boy, then fifteen, was stabbed to death near Croxfield Town Hall during an altercation with some other youths. As Stuart, a teacher who had been at the school almost a decade, informed me:

There’s probably been six kids murdered in this school, in the time, I’ve been here ... as teenagers, who were here when I was here ... we lost another one this year [referring to the most recent stabbing].

(Stuart, Greenvale-Teacher: IT28-04-05)

This was shocking and as the news percolated through to the staffroom, the mood was melancholy. Staff talked about the nature of violence on “the streets” and the “realities” of life in Croxfield for black youth. Staff seemed to have a shared language and understanding through which they could talk about such painful incidents. These were built from routine interactions and their own experiences of violence and incivility encountered in Earlsdale and elsewhere in Croxfield.

On other occasions, it was media reports or the more prosaic forms of incivility experienced within the locality which were refracted in the staffroom (e.g. witnessing interpersonal violence in public). Whilst some of these topics of conversation were prompted by wider events, they were framed by the immediate experiences of living and working in Croxfield and the pressures and realities with which many residents had to cope. Despite the different class and cultural locations they inhabited, staff developed shared representations and understandings of the locality. As well as being cathartic, the symbolic content of staffroom talk revealed the permeability of Greenvale to the outside social world. It reinforced the perception expressed by one informant that pupils “come in from a hostile environment. Outside these walls, it’s very hostile” (Stuart, Greenvale-Teacher: IT28-4-05). Staffroom talk contributed to a sense that Greenvale was a sanctuary amidst the turbulent social storms of the inner-city, not only for the pupils, but for the adults. TAs and teachers were able to bridge the occupational and social distances which separated them in the social space through these staffroom explorations of their fears and anxieties about the social disorganisation they experienced. We-ness was thus constituted and re-constituted.

In a similar vein, the staffroom was a refuge where teachers and TAs could offer each other support, and comment emotively about problems with pupils and parents. The character of interpersonal relations, and shared understandings of workplace culture, meant that issues such as the stress of dealing with what were perceived as very demanding middle-class parents was coped with in a collaborative fashion, as this excerpt from fieldnotes taken at a parents’ evening highlights:

Context: Sarah comes into the staffroom, visibly upset. I am sat with several teachers and TAs around the table.

Stuart (Teacher): What’s wrong?

Sarah (Teacher): Urh! I hate snooty parents. Nothing I do is good enough. She said that her daughter is tormented and unhappy and that the work was boring. She said, [affects whining voice] “why is your class so noisy?” ... Argh!

Stuart (Teacher): Don’t worry, she won’t be here long. The school’s not good enough for them. It never is.

(Staffroom, Greenvale: FN24-11-04)

Sarah was in her second year of teaching and relatively inexperienced. Stuart was a long-serving teacher speaking from a position of authority and understanding. His comments born of experience were words of consolation: that this was normal, and that Sarah should not be distraught about it, and that in general the middle-class children did not stay, especially if their parents were unhappy. In doing so, Stuart, was also reaffirming the wider commitment of the school to its working-class location, and its oppositional stance towards middle-class power as documented in chapter 7. Incidents such as these could also be seen as the counterparts to the more satirical themes of class discussed above in relation to humour. At the same time they illustrate the way that as a backstage region the staffroom could offer “refuge” as well as opportunities for pleasure.

### **9.2.1. Unsettled and unsettling positions**

As noted in chapter 6, the few middle-class TAs at Greenvale, namely Michelle and Lillian, occupied indeterminate class positions within the social space. In the case of Michelle, her class position was mediated by her strong identification with Croxfield and her family’s intergenerational presence, and her black Caribbean partner’s working-class background in Croxfield. Lillian had a more traditional white middle-class background but was similarly partnered with a black working-class Caribbean man. Bahar, also, was not easily placed in relation to the working-class Turkish-speaking groups in the locality. These assistants’ ambiguous formations of race, class and culture resulted in equally unsettled positions within Greenvale’s cultural topography, contributing to its friction and hybridity. This was reflected in their particularly abrasive and sometimes antagonistic relationships with Bev<sup>65</sup>:

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<sup>65</sup> For an example of Bahar’s abrasive relationship with Bev see §8.2.



I would say it's a very – [pause] it's a difficult relationship. And I have to be very sure – even as a parent, I had to be very strong and very sure of what I was saying or what I was doing. And even more so now. And I'm very clear about my role as a learning mentor and my role as a parent. And kind of never the twain.

(Michelle, Greenvale-LM: IT17-03-05)

That these assistants' presence was institutionally *valuable* and *difficult* was acknowledged by Bev. Speaking about Bahar's appointment to a newly created post as a BTA during the fieldwork period, Bev explained:

Bahar did not want to do this job [as BTA]. And I had to really lean on her to do the job, because she was somebody who was starting to feel bored with what she was doing. And often when people who are quite driven get bored, they become ... destructive. And it's not because I thought she – well, there was a danger. It's an ever present danger. So you kind of need to fill people up, keep them going. And it took me long while to persuade her that it was the role to have.

(Bev, Greenvale-Head: IT27-04-05)

For Lillian, the incongruity between the habitus and its present day institutional contexts of experience amongst a predominantly working-class and black occupational grouping was problematic and resulted in a somewhat ambiguous positioning vis-à-vis the workplace culture at Greenvale:

I'm concerned about my relationship with black women [at Greenvale], certainly, because of [daughter's name] and also making more of an effort. It's quite interesting how as a white person, a white woman, you make, consciously make, more of an effort to get on, and it's very important to me because I respect them ... But there is that sort of odd sense of where you feel that you communicate better with certain people because of common interest ... common ground ... Maybe they don't feel that they can talk about the same things. You know, I'm a bit of an oddball anyway, I mean, I'm not typical of – I'm not like Gail, or, you know, I'm not a working-class, Croxfield white person, I'm, you know, from a middle-class arty background ... And, you know, that gets in the way sometimes.

(Lillian, Greenvale-TA: IT21-02-05)

Lillian also had a difficult relationship with Bev which echoed the sentiments of Michelle and contributed to her unsettled position at Greenvale. She added: "I certainly can now [get on] with Bev because she's not intimidated by me ... she knows me and she knows that, you know, I value her" (IT21-02-05). Whilst clearly these TAs found it difficult to "fit" into Greenvale's staff workplace culture, they were able to

negotiate its contours and contributed to its fluidity, even if they did not participate as enthusiastically as others. Their experiences and positioning highlight how tensions were transformed into *consolidating frictions* – that is, brought together and managed in what could be viewed as a productive manner by Bev. As one middle-class parent said to me:

I think Bev does encourage people to be open to things ... she's quite good at bringing people in, who might disagree with the school, and in other schools would become real adversaries, but she is really good at bringing them in.

(Arabella, Greenvale-Chair-of-PC: IT19-05-05)

These then were individuals whose presence constituted a potential threat, in different ways, to Bev's authority and the institutional forms of community she had established. At the same time their skills, commitment and dispositions were necessary. This enabled a hybrid cultural landscape which was capable of incorporating divergent and sometimes conflicting perspectives. In the next section, I examine the part played by Bev and other senior leadership in staffroom interactions.

### **9.2.2. Senior leadership in the Staffroom**

As mentioned in the discussion on jocularity, Owen, the deputy, was a participant in the staff's humorous exchanges. Both he and Hazel, another member of the senior leadership team, were regular users of the staffroom. I observed that their presence did not dramatically alter social interactions. Insofar as Owen was perceived as an active and legitimate participant in jocular interactions, assistants used humour to sometimes communicate subversive messages. This is illustrated in the fieldnote extract below:

A mixture of teachers and TAs are sat around the table. The staff have a national lottery sweepstake, and Yolanda is in charge of collecting the money. She is walking the staffroom shouting "*Lottery! Lottery!*" to collect money. As Yolanda approaches, Owen says he is not putting any money in this week. Gail adds, "I ain't playing. I never have any fucking money anyway; don't get paid enough". [She and Yolanda laugh, Owen does not respond].

(Staffroom: FN18-04-05)

Emerson has argued that because humour does not often "officially" count within interactions, it is therefore not taken into consideration in the assessment and evaluation of an encounter, and for that very reason, "persons are induced to risk

messages that might be unacceptable if stated seriously” (1969: 170). This can be seen in the extract above: Gail’s remark is an implicit reproach to Owen. Her comment that she is not paid enough generates collusive laughter between her and Yolanda. The laughter provides a cover for the more risky message conveyed to Owen, as a member of senior leadership, about assistants’ poor pay, one which his silence acknowledges. Assistants could indulge in subversive exchanges because humour makes deniability possible. After all, humour is not to be taken seriously.

Bev’s presence in the staffroom was experienced somewhat differently from that of Owen or Hazel. As I discussed in chapter 7, Bev was a highly visible and mobile head, who appeared to be always engaged in talk with staff, demonstrating a concern and focus on sustaining relationships. This was very much an aspect of her leadership style. Discussions in chapters 6 and 7, demonstrated that Bev’s leadership style and presentation of self could be experienced as domineering, controlling and at times alienating within situated interactions. Her presence therefore in the staffroom could be seen as potentially problematic.

Bev was an active participant in humorous exchanges within the staffroom; her demeanour was highly informal and casual. Her use and grasp of staffroom humour demonstrated an adroit negotiation of the cultural repertoire of stories and knowledge of individuals. As an established and long-serving head, she represented an important aspect of the school’s collective memory. Her staffroom exchanges appeared to contribute to a sense of solidarity between leader and followers. It was apparent that she enjoyed the theatre of leadership within the staffroom, where she could tailor her performances more exactly to her audience; within this backstage region she could focus on displaying the caring face of leadership, renewing her legitimacy with the staff.

However, I observed that her position in conversational exchanges was different to other participants. She was mainly the instigator of humour, rarely the recipient, in keeping with Goffman’s observation that it is the prerogative of those in positions of authority to inject a “glaze of sociability that all can enjoy” (1972: 114). Informants’ accounts indicate that she was not viewed in the same way as most other staff members as a potential conversational partner in banter. As one TA said: “no, it’s not the same. We have our laughs, and we have our jokes, right? But then, like ... we

know like, yeah, you're senior management" (Yolanda, Greenvale-TA: IT18-03-05). Her use of humour often appeared intentionally ambiguous, as one teacher commented:

I feel a bit more relaxed around Owen but I still think of Bev as she is my boss, you know ... Bev to me, is like work, what's happening, what's going on ... Before, I used to think *was that a joke*, or was she being serious? She's got quite a dry sense of humour [laughs].

(Sarah, Greenvale-Teacher: IT16-03-05)

As Sarah's extract highlights, power and ambiguity are intimately connected. Bev's enactments of instigated humour were often acerbic and difficult to read within an interaction. On one occasion, upon spotting me at a parents' evening talking with some assistants, she greeted me with: "*Who let him in!*" [faint smile] (FN: 5-06-05)<sup>66</sup>. Holmes and Marra (2006) notes that it is the latent ambiguity in humour which makes it an attractive tool of managerial control. They argue that "from the point of view of the workplace leader, humour is a valuable discursive resource which can be drawn on to assist in achieving workplace goals, since it makes it possible to 'do' both power and politeness, often simultaneously" (2006: 125). By generating ambiguity within interactions, through humour, Bev was able to disrupt and inhibit others from asserting themselves, since as Sarah points out, they would be unsure *how* to respond. If an individual cannot orientate themselves towards the meanings of others, they will find it difficult to act and express themselves within the interaction. Bev's use of humour reflected a wider tendency documented in the previous chapter in relation to support staff meetings to deploy "repressive" forms of talk within conversations to silence dissenting views (Holmes, 2000).

Overall, Bev's interactions within the staffroom strongly suggested that she acknowledged the staffroom as an important space of relaxation which made overt use and display of managerial power inappropriate, and thus humour was the main, and *only* (legitimate) way of "doing power" in this setting. In this way she was also *constrained* in her exercise of power.

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<sup>66</sup> Another relevant example is the exchange between myself and Bev mentioned in §4.4.2.

### 9.2.3. Collegiality and inclusion

Whilst I have mainly focused on the staffroom, it was apparent from interview data and observations of other settings that the forms of sociality generated in the staffroom sustained a wider culture of collegiality and care amongst the staff. Greenvale was perceived as being especially welcoming to staff from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. A black African teacher who had experienced overt racism in a previous school told me:

I was really surprised when I came here at the number of black teachers here ... the friendliness and the atmosphere ... it's quite a different atmosphere to other schools I've been to ... nobody looks down on you because of the colour of your skin.

(Cecilia, Greenvale-Teacher: IT7-03-05)

Several interviewees connected the sense of collegiality with the interaction rituals within the staffroom:

one of the strengths of the school is the staff, when I came here, I really loved the atmosphere I saw round the [dining] table, whereas where I was before, people got their lunch, in a corner and it was you know, it was a sort of segregation, whereas, here, you know, you can feel comfortable, if you've got a problem you can go to anyone, you can go into anyone's classroom.

(Muriel, Greenvale-Teacher: IT16-03-05)

As Muriel points out, and several other teachers and TAs reiterated, the staffroom at Greenvale was not experienced as a hierarchical or segregated space. Many of the working-class TAs expected to be marginalised within such spaces and were pleasantly surprised at the ease of social interaction in the staffroom:

Working in this school, than working in other schools, [where] you find that there's a regime where there's teachers and LSAs: they don't mix. I've found that a lot ... even in the staffroom, I've found them very hostile: it would be teachers one side and LSAs one side. You would be frightened even to ask a question, you wouldn't even know who to ask. This school is very warm.

(Phoebe, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-05)

Greenvale staff culture was indicative of what Nias (1998) refers to as a collaborative workplace culture. She describes the notion thus:

We found that teachers wanted their colleagues to be sensitive to their emotional needs, to respond with empathy, sympathy, and, occasionally, wise counselling. They were deeply appreciative of opportunities to talk, to share

their sense of worthlessness and failure, to relax and above all to laugh. (1998: 1260)

Specifically it was a culture that appeared to foster openness towards working-class cultural styles and identities. Within backstage regions such as the staffroom, TAs and teachers were encouraged to communicate and interact in their own voices and cultural styles. Being working-class and “common” was a legitimate identity amongst others. As one black teacher told me:

I think it's good that they [the staff] are given a space to be themselves, because ... that shows ... [the children] that they can be themselves. They don't have to change who they are to please people ... I think that's really important ... I think it's very important to be yourself, and I am myself here, say like I am outside of school, I don't think you should have to change.

(Adelaide, Greenvale-Teacher: IT22-06-05)

This pointed to a strong and cohesive sense of identity and belonging which encompassed different occupational groups. Consequently, assistants and teachers saw each other as sources of emotional and social support:

We're all a community; we're all together, no matter what. Whether you're the head teacher, the deputy head, the caretaker, we're all together in this, you know, because really it is like a family.

(Agnes, Greenvale-TA: IT9-03-05)

There's always a chain of people where you can share your ideas with, or people listen to you if you've got any situation. And that stems from the head as well.

(Marlon, Greenvale-TA: IT16-03-05)

Most of the TAs attributed the conviviality of TA-teacher interactions to Bev in setting the cultural and symbolic conditions for the school.

I suppose it's changes that Bev has made. We are all just as important, from the cleaning staff up to the headteacher, we all have a role to play and it works ... We are all in the same job, we are all in the same place.

(Gail, Greenvale-TA: IT1-03-5)

As we have seen, the cultural landscape of Greenvale was characterised by humour, which was used as a valued interpersonal resource within interaction rituals. Moreover the content of this humour was shown to have ideological significance in relation to class and locality. It allowed for a continually-iterated and fluid cultural topography

which drew from the diversity of staff cultural styles and values in a *consolidating friction*. Overall, Greenvale's workplace culture was experienced as cohesive and a context in which assistants could make a valued contribution. I also documented the extent to which leadership style contributed to the nature and values of the staff culture. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the different cultural topography at Plumtree, and conclude on a contrastive note.

### **9.3.      *The staffroom at Plumtree***

It became apparent during the fieldwork that the Plumtree staffroom did not play such a pivotal role in the social and cultural life of the staff as it did at Greenvale. The entrance to the staffroom itself was off a main corridor on the first floor, which also housed the Junior classrooms. Physically it was a single space, with a kitchen worktop running along one side, a large table with chairs, which was the main focus for eating and general conversation. There was another section with low-rise chairs and tables with magazines etc., which served a similar function as in Greenvale, as a space where individuals sat to read or conduct more "private" conversations. There was a wide expansive whiteboard, which filled the majority of the right-hand wall. This was an important fixture, and the main source of day-to-day information exchange between the senior leadership and staff. The whiteboard was a prominent feature of the staffroom, and functioned as a spur for conversation and comment. Insofar as staffroom regulars were critical of communication practices within the school, the whiteboard became an ironic symbol of their perceived failure.

Whilst I observed that all staff would use the staffroom at various points during a typical day, even if just to fetch a glass of water or check the whiteboard, some individuals and groups were conspicuous in their absence, especially during key points of temporal convergence in the school day such as break and lunch times. A rough and ready summary of users in relation to the social uses of the staffroom indicated that regulars tended to be middle-class assistants (Chloe, Ellie, Kirsten, Anthea), teachers (Niamh, Avril, Caragh, Rachel); occasional users were those whose presence was more variable (Estella, Yvette, Ruth, Fiona, Lynne, Lucia); rare users were those whom I seldom saw actively socialising in the staffroom for any significant period (Andre, Paul, Isaac, Leanne, Peter, Tom). This typology should be viewed as heuristic device for the

analysis which follows since the staffroom was not viewed by many TAs or teachers as central to their institutional experience.

### **9.3.1. Back or frontstage?**

As part of the openness that Tom encouraged in the school, there appeared to be no control on who could use the staffroom and it tended to be viewed as a *shared* and *socially* porous space. It was often used by the Parents' Committee to hold their meetings and it was not uncommon to find parent volunteers and other visitors to the school in there. On one notable occasion during fieldwork I came across two middle-class mothers in the staffroom making jam; an activity which by its nature resulted in their presence for a prolonged period, overlapping with the morning break. Similarly, children were not barred from entering the staffroom as they were at Greenvale. It was also used occasionally for extra-curricular activities and assistants' group work. It could therefore not be realised as a classic backstage region as found in Greenvale. As Goffman observed, for a setting to function as a backstage region, it needs to be a "place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude", in this case either parents or pupils (1969/1990: 116). With little or no backstage control, staff at Plumtree were exposed to intrusion and surveillance. This can be contrasted with the situation at Greenvale where specific practices, such as restricting parents' movements within the school after drop-off, were explicitly intended to deflect and control specifically middle-class access and action. As Lillian, a middle-class assistant commented:

They've put things in place where, you know, parents can't come in upstairs to take the child into the classroom, which some of the middle class parents find very difficult. And I hate putting labels on things but you can actually identify those that want to and those that [don't] ... You know, it's difficult because it's one thing where somebody wants to go and be confrontational with a teacher, which is what they're protecting them from, because you have to arrange for an appointment. And it's another thing where it's much more laid back where there are parents coming in, milling in, like in reception, and just settling and then leaving. But it can be quite disruptive to the whole school.

(Lillian, Greenvale -TA: IT21-02-05)

The lack of backstage control at Plumtree appeared to generate a number of situational constraints on the kind of talk that was considered acceptable within the staffroom in relation to parents and pupils. The ribald humour and swearing that was



so characteristic of staffroom interaction at Greenvale would have seemed risky and inappropriate here. Likewise, in stark contrast to critical comments made in private to me and to each other in other settings, criticism or discussion of the stresses and demands made by middle-class parents appeared to be curtailed in a space that was effectively “open” to the very objects of such talk. The presence of the middle-class assistants who were also parents within Plumtree’s informal spaces was an additional factor rendering the staffroom socially permeable to the parental field. As one middle-class parent commented: “they provide a link between school and other parents, you know, if there are things going on, you hear about it from them rather than [teachers]” (Amy, Plumtree-Parent: IT9-11-04). Both directly and indirectly, this appeared to create ambiguity and situational uncertainty for a number of working-class TAs:

Parents are always involved in the school. They’ve got too much to say, they either don’t like this, or they want it this way, and you know, there’s just too much of parents in here ... Parents who’ve become TAs, their children are here, it’s just weird, it’s just too much ... half the kids who are bad, their parents work here. So the kids think they can get away with murder, and I think that’s wrong.

(Keisha, Plumtree-TA: IT12-11-04)

The presence of these assistants contributed to a transformation of the staffroom into something more akin to a frontstage setting, which intensified the demands for self-regulation and interactional control. In light of the anger and resentment expressed in interviews, some of which was documented in chapter 7, the fact that teachers and assistants could not express certain issues, or even make casual mention of them, in what should have been “their” informal space generated further frustration.

### **9.3.2. Middle-class assistants: rituals of complaint**

Middle-class experiences of the staffroom and other informal settings were characterised by interaction rituals of complaint. The middle-class assistants tended to be regulars within the staffroom. It seemed to be a space in which they felt comfortable. It was a space where, along with some teachers, they frequently expressed their own frustrations, criticisms and grievances, primarily directed at the senior leadership, whom they publically blamed for virtually all the perceived problems within the school. Through humour and ridicule of the senior management, the school culture itself was regularly pilloried. For example, complaints about poor

communication tended to be most frequent. In response to an incident where Tom was said to have failed to communicate an important piece of information, a teacher sarcastically commented: “Every morning, we mustn’t forget our pledge of non-communication must we” [laughter] (Erlina, Staffroom: FN11-01-05). Such conversations were not uncommon, and reflected the way humour was routinely used in social interaction. On numerous occasions I observed the re-telling of elaborate anecdotes intended as humorous derogations detailing the extent of Tom or Peter’s ineffective leadership, with each story claiming to be an illustration of unsurpassed ineptitude and insensitivity. I noticed also that there was collective *enjoyment* in the telling of these narratives. They seemed to express the problematic aspects of social relations within Plumtree as satirical comic absurdities. These derogations were not intended to elicit redress, but to communicate solidarity amongst speakers and audience. It seemed that to some extent, to be in the staffroom and participate in these rituals of complaint was an opportunity to display one’s cultural competence and understanding of Plumtree’s informal institutional order. As Weeks (2004: 10) explains:

These rituals of complaint – for that is what they are – do have their uses. They offer legitimate means of bonding and blaming and, occasionally, back stabbing. ... What is more, they are a mechanism of self-positioning. They provide space with what might otherwise be a suffocating culture. ... They are a way of displaying one’s personal stance toward the organisation and its culture, a way of positioning oneself in its landscape of overlapping subcultures and in its status hierarchy.

For middle-class assistants, complaining talk appeared to be a way to signal their own position within the fragmented workplace topography. The complexities and consequences of interaction rituals increasingly focused on complaints can be seen in this extract from an interview with Chloe:

This morning, the funniest thing [happened in the morning meeting]<sup>67</sup>. Well, we sort of stand there, and you know there’s the [white] board up. Basically Tom and Peter will come in and go, “Right, well, it’s Thursday today. At 10.40 we’ve got so-and-so coming in. Ayo’s going to be in today. Fiona’s ill and so she’s got a supply teacher in nursery. Are there any questions? No, off we go, right.” And this morning Estella had to do it and she said, “Right, Tom and

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<sup>67</sup> These brief morning meetings were an opportunity mainly for senior leadership staff to communicate key events or activities occurring that day. The meetings were mainly attended by teachers. The majority of TAs did not attend as their working day did not start until after 9am. Middle-class assistants were more likely to be able to attend as they had to be at school earlier to drop off their children. Their attendance however constituted unpaid time.

Peter have asked me to do the meeting. It's going to be an exercise this morning in silent reading." And we all sat and read. And she said, "There'll be questions." And so we all had a minute or two and she said, "Okay, how many names on the board for Thursday begin with the letter J?" There were three. And that was it. And you just think this is a joke that every day we have to stand here while the two senior members of our, you know, management staff read to us ... what it says on a blackboard. I mean, how helpful is that? ... I mean, we're all sitting there nodding and sort of thinking, "oh, bless them, let's give them their nice time to stand up in front of us," and they think they're doing the right thing. And do they think we're that stupid that that's helpful for them to read it to us? No, we should be – that should be the time when we should say, "Listen, we don't agree with you." ... You know, "We've chatted, we all went to the pub last night," or, "we sat in the staffroom chatting and we think that you should have done that – handled that differently". That's what – that's when the whole school's together and we should talk about important things. We can all read!

(Chloe, Plumtree-TA: IT27-01-05)

Chloe clearly relished the telling of the anecdote (which was likely to be retold to other audiences), signalled by the phrase "the funniest thing". Her account is interesting because it illustrates how widespread the derogation of Tom and Peter was; in a sense, it had become part of the institutional cultural repertoire of the staff. It was a joint endeavour, which enabled them to engage in the collective satirical performance that Chloe describes. The staging and narrative indicate that the humour is founded on the recognition of an incongruity within the staff's experience of these morning meetings, between the intended meaning and purpose and their own interpretation. The use of mimicry by Estella as a distancing strategy in the deployment of humour indicates that although she has been asked to "stand in" for Tom and Peter, she does not identify with the role and positional authority. In fact, she uses the authority and dramaturgic power invested in her position on this occasion to subvert and ridicule the ritual itself through parody. This is what enabled the joke to be collectively shared and created a sense of "us", the staff present, and "them", Tom and Peter. Parody works precisely because audiences are familiar with the original performance. Chloe's retelling also highlights the double significance of the parody; at one level it was clearly a "joke" at the expense of Tom and Peter and a criticism of the morning meetings, but at the same time it highlighted the staff's own complicity in the reproduction of, and contribution to, the failings they so accurately parody.

Further analysis of the symbolic consequences of this kind of talk within interaction rituals can be made. Gabriel's (1995) exploration of the use of stories and narratives within organisations is useful in this regard. He argues that the kinds of stories individuals tell within organisational contexts can engender particular emotionally-motivating expressive identities. Chloe's account and the experiences she recited fall under the rubric of what Gabriel refers to as "gripe" narratives. As he notes:

while highlighting the absurdity of the system and subverting the authority of those in power, such stories emphasize victimhood rather than agency, seeking to elicit sympathy ... Gripes ... are attempts to overcome pain and suffering symbolically, and to turn material defeat into moral victory. (Gabriel, 1995: 487)

In the context of Chloe's production of the story, the intent is to elicit my sympathy for the staff and denotes an intimacy with the audience and the situation. The production of humour largely grounded in these forms of talk – gripes, ridicule, and derogations of school practices and management – was, a way of coping with what was a very difficult situation for some TAs and teachers alike. On occasions such as that retold by Chloe, it provided bridging experiences of momentary solidarity. There was pleasure to be had from these rituals of complaints:

you get fed-up of asking, not being told, and there is a point at which, kind of, you just, kind of, give up and you just go with the flow. And if you were being critical of this you'd say, basically, we get some enjoyment out of [it] ... You're kind of, basically, passing the blame around. It's not very constructive but I'm afraid that's what happens when you are constantly not given information. So it becomes a sort of thing that you just complain about.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

It was clear, as illustrated by Ellie's comment, that whilst all those present gained much enjoyment from the performance, it did not form the basis of a challenge to the power structures of the school. Such performances could be accomplished because they did not engage with the more problematic issue of teachers' and TAs' complicity in the reproduction of the culture and leadership which they berated. They left unspoken some of the other underlying divisions amongst staff (particularly amongst teachers), which would have to be tackled were any changes to occur.

Further, interactions of the kind reported by Chloe tended to occur amongst established groupings rather than across them. This is suggested in the extract above,

when she refers to the “we” that “all went to the pub last night” – a grouping of middle-class TAs and some teachers who socialised outside of work in Northwick – and the “we”, referring to the staff who were present in the morning meeting. The former group contained the middle-class TAs and a number of relatively new teachers who were vocal critics of the leadership and perceived as a “clique” by other teachers and assistants.

Moreover, the dominant mood of complaints and ridicule also seemed to supplant more cooperative and supportive forms of talk. For example, during the fieldwork, a Turkish member of Sue’s extended family was fatally stabbed in a robbery in Northwick. This happened just before the Christmas break when I had stopped fieldwork for the term, hence I did not witness the immediate reactions at the school. By the time I returned, at the start of the new year, I observed that it aroused very little or no public comment. It seemed that staff found it very difficult to integrate such a brutal event in their symbolic constructions of Northwick as an island adrift from the violence which was elsewhere in “Croxford proper”. At Greenvale, in contrast, the staff appeared to have the symbolic resources through which such events could be comprehended and made intelligible, and the social mechanisms to activate collegial support.

### **9.3.3. Working-class TAs: working at a distance**

I observed that many of the working-class TAs at Plumtree spent little time in the staffroom during either the short first break or lunch time. Whilst assistants’ working patterns were inevitably a constraint on their presence in the staffroom, this was no more so than at Greenvale. It was common for assistants to undertake playground duties in the short break in the morning, and several of them also did lunch-time duties, but these were in rotation. The short break was generally experienced as hurried and TAs tended to interact with those in their immediate work situation: “If you work in the same classroom together you form a bond ... let’s face it, it’s a 15-minute break; you hardly get any time to speak to anyone [else]” (Hettie, Plumtree-TA: FN30-09-04). I observed that amongst the working-class TAs, Hettie, Ruth and Lucia would often eat lunch together in the dinner hall with the children, or go to a café outside the school for some of the lunch break. They told me that this routine of

eating lunch together started when they worked together in the same class previously, and that they used to have lunch with the children they were assigned to work with. Shared routines and experiences arising from classroom working relations seemed to account for some of the patterns of social interaction during lunch times.

When I asked some of these assistants explicitly why they did not often use the staffroom, one responded:

I find the staffroom stuffy. Smelly and stuffy. It's so small ... If you go up [there] and people are speaking you feel that you are intruding on their conversation because it is so small.

(Hettie, Plumtree-TA: FN30-09-04)

For Hettie, the staffroom was a space in which she felt conspicuous and in which (as she saw it) her presence was experienced as intrusive. This illustrated that some TAs did not identify with the staffroom as a space which belonged to them or in which they belonged. Hettie's extract also suggests that she did not consider the topics she might have "intruded" on to be conversations in which she could or would like to participate. Middle-class cultural style seemed to be more firmly established within the staffroom at Plumtree in contrast to the more culturally hybrid forms at Greenvale. Esma avoided the staffroom for other reasons:

I mean I don't like going into the staffroom, [its] all the gossiping and the "This said this, and that said that". I've never – all the time that I've been here, I've never been into that sort of thing. I tend to keep myself to myself ... I'm always the last one to hear everything ... Because I don't really involve myself in it. I don't like that sort of thing. So I just try and stay away from it.

(Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-10-04)

The staffroom was seen as too overtly political and symbolised something she did not want to be identified with. This is an important point and highlights how frustrated expressions of voice (such as those outlined in relation to the support staff meetings in chapter 8) were displaced into the staffroom setting, thus transforming it into a key site of criticism, gossip and complaints about the management of the school. Esma's reluctance to identify with the staffroom due to the "gossiping" illustrates how being labelled as a "gossip" or agitator was to be publically identified as taking an antagonistic relation to the management or some aspect of the school. To be a staffroom person, from Esma's perspective, was to claim a confrontational identity. Avoidance of the

staffroom was therefore a source of oppositional identity, a way of *distancing* herself from critical figures such as Ellie and Chloe.

On the occasions that I observed working-class assistants in the staffroom, I noted that they seemed uncomfortable in the presence of some teachers, particularly those who worked in the Infants. Certainly Ruth perceived there to be a divide:

frankly a lot of new teachers that come in have got this thing that they're a little bit better than any LSA, because they've been to college, university ... But they come in with this attitude that they – you know, because they've got all these letters, they know it all, you know. And that really does annoy me sometimes.

(Ruth, Plumtree-TA: IT12-04-04)

This divide appeared to be based on differences in educational cultural capital between working-class assistants and teachers. Whilst there were common topics of conversation, interactions tended to follow classed occupation lines. When these cross-occupational conversations did occur, they were somewhat stilted, and TAs' appeared reticent. Andre rarely spent any time in the staffroom, and for him, the interaction patterns within the staffroom epitomised the wider occupational divisions in the school:

I don't know, I think it's kind of divided, personally, I may be wrong here, but seeing – you look, you have all – the [learning] mentors, the teaching assistants, the LSA, they're together, and then you have the teachers, and they're together. So that's the split, you can tell straightaway that's the split, 'cos if you go in the staffroom, you will see the teachers all together, and you will see everyone else together.

(Andre, Plumtree-TA: IT16-06-4)

As I have illustrated, Plumtree's cultural landscape seemed highly fragmented and frayed. However, relative to teachers, (working-class) assistants appeared more resilient and distanced from the intense expressions of anger and complaints.

For most of these TAs then, there was a sense of detachment and resistance displayed towards social interactions in informal settings, in response to their marginal position. This was expressed through a pervasive cynicism towards the dominant cultural practices and groups within the school. Collinson's work suggests that resistance through distance as a strategy is not uncommon amongst low-status workers who "often feel particularly vulnerable, unfairly treated and unacknowledged" (1994: 180).

Gabriel's discussion of worker resistance within organisations explicates the subjective orientations of such a position:

cynicism is based on the individual's acknowledgement of an instrumental dependence on the organisation and simultaneous denial of psychological attachment to it. Thus, the cynics' core fantasy is the belief that they remain 'unpolluted,' untouched by the organization's iniquities. ... [C]ynicism and distancing disable the critical viewpoint from which a challenge to the organisation may be raised ... [and] denies that there is a normative viewpoint at all. (1999: 191)

As I have shown, Tom's style of leadership engendered a distrust of managerial motives. Amongst some of the TAs, therefore, there was a pronounced cynicism which developed in response to the institutional disorder and perceived lack of leadership. This was most clearly articulated amongst the working-class assistants, who tended to avoid micro-political engagement and action. This cynicism was expressed in numerous ways, such as non-attendance at the (supposedly) weekly support staff meetings, bypassing the command hierarchy, and avoidance of the staffroom. TAs also resisted managerial control and expressed dissatisfaction through more symbolic avenues, for instance through escape fantasies of leaving for better opportunities elsewhere:

I could work and do a soccer school around the corner from me, it would take me no longer than three minutes to walk from my house to my soccer school, a hundred pounds a day, cash in hand, start nine-thirty, finish at four-thirty. I don't have to do no planning ... I just got to turn up, play football all day long ... But because I enjoy working with the kids here ... I do it here.

(Andre, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-05)

As organisational theorists have noted, workers' fantasies not only highlight dissatisfaction with working conditions, but "humanised their working lives, offering them a form of consolation based on projected and supposedly better alternatives" (Brown and Humphreys, 2006: 247). The articulation of escape fantasies amongst some of the working-class TAs at Plumtree facilitated the construction of symbolic spaces and forms of expression where they could demonstrate a sense of selfhood and autonomy beyond the grasp of institutional and power relations. Cynicism appeared to give some working-class TAs a sense of freedom and detachment, without changing their status or subordination, or giving rise to collective challenges against class or



managerial power. From the perspective of middle-class TAs, such an *apolitical* stance was read as a sign of submissiveness and passivity:

[They are] more long-suffering really [and] have a slightly, you know different attitude; are a bit more sceptical in some ways about the whole running of this place ... They are less vocal I think.

(Ellie, Plumtree-TA: IT22-06-5)

#### **9.3.4. Alternative backstage regions**

I was initially puzzled by assistants' general absence from and indifference to the staffroom given the central importance of the staffroom as a site of social interaction at Greenvale. The emotional demands of their role, in combination with the heightened level of impression management needed within the interaction rituals of their work situation, created a need for spaces where they could express other identities and "step out of character" (Goffman, 1969/1990: 115), spaces where different "feelings rules" would be operative (Clark, 1997).

With children that I work with – the way the relationship is between them, when they're having a particularly bad time, nine times out of ten, it'll be me that gets the brunt of it. Where they're taking out all their anger, all their – whatever pent up feelings they've got inside themselves is being directed at me.

(Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-10-04)

This job is very stressful, and you go home really, really worn out, mentally.

(Ruth, Plumtree-TA: IT12-04-04)

TAs wanted spaces where they could reassert some backstage control, which as Goffman observed "plays a significant role in the process of 'work control' whereby individuals attempt to buffer themselves from the deterministic demands that surround them" (1969/1990: 116). However, as I have shown, many TAs did not feel that the staffroom was a space in which they could relax, recuperate and feel valued and accepted. What I came to realise was that the frustrated realisation of the staffroom as a backstage led to the proliferation of other ersatz spaces which were largely invisible to non-participants such as me.

During one lunch break, I chanced upon several TAs (Hettie, Andre, Ruth, Lucia) in the computing suite. Andre at the time was running an *ad hoc* computer club for pupils

who found it difficult to be in the playground during lunchtime. When I asked them what they were *all* doing there, Hettie said: “see, this is another place we hide out at lunchtime [laughs]” (FN30-09-04). Her comments reiterate the fact that not only did some TAs not view the staffroom as a place for social interaction but that they also actively avoided using it. Instead, it was within small interstitial social spaces, such as the computing suite, or an unused classroom during breaks, that they could relax and unwind in the company of those they saw as sharing a common fate. These impromptu gathering places offered assistants opportunities to share frustrations and successes, difficulties with pupils and teachers, and aspects of their personal lives: “you can have a good old natter [with other TAs] about what the kids are going on about and how the teacher’s getting on your nerves ... and whatever” (Esma, Plumtree-LM: IT15-10-04).

Given the constraining and highly-regulated character of frontstage interactions within the classroom, many TAs were clearly relieved to occupy spaces away from the teachers’ gaze. This is consistent with Rueda and Monzó finding that assistants’ informal conversations tended to be about “teachers asserting their position of authority in the classroom and treating paraeducators with little respect” and that this “permeated within a subculture of paraeducators” (2002: 516-517).

I found another space, outside where bikes were kept, which seemed to function as a backstage arena. I spent most of fieldwork unaware of its existence as a social space. It was a space where smokers, a relatively small minority within the school, congregated for “fag breaks”. According to Paechter (2004: 34) areas where smokers congregate within schools:

are interesting spaces, with a role similar to that of the space behind the bike sheds for students. Although many teachers of course do visit ... to service their nicotine habit, many others do not, and are there simply for the company ... [they] tend to be the hotbeds of rebellion, or the places where the action is. They are perceived as the place to have fun, rather than to work, where the cool people hang out.

It seems that appearances by individual staff members were habitual enough for there to be “regulars”. Two teachers, Caragh and Isaac, and one TA, Ruth, were identifiable regulars. During my one and only observation there, I was impressed by the candidness of talk. Isaac had been having a particularly fraught relationship with a TA in his class. He swore – one of the few occasions I had witnessed any swearing throughout my

fieldwork at Plumtree – and emitted a stream of invective about her faults as an assistant. There was also criticism of the senior management, in a less jocular and veiled form than usual. Although Isaac informed me that usual subjects of conversation were, “bitching about the kids and talking about Eastenders”<sup>68</sup> (FN21-04-05), the “shed” offered a level of privacy and insulation not found in other spaces within the school. It was not an institutionally-recognised arena for social interaction and, perhaps for that very reason, it facilitated the production of freer, less scripted positions within the cultural landscape of Plumtree. I have no evidence of the specific impact of interactions in the “shed” on wider culture, but the mere fact that some staff preferred to have those informal conversations in the shed is another indication of the failure of the staffroom as a backstage arena, and the ambivalence of staff’s experience of it. The shed area then demonstrated the creative ways staff coped, adopting alternative and parallel spaces of sociality outside of the often tense and socially-uneasy character of interactions within the staffroom.

Insofar as TAs and teachers avoided interaction in what was supposed to be a communal informal space, they missed out on the opportunity to develop knowledge about their common interests and differences. This reduced the opportunities for shared emotionally-energising rituals that might generate cultural symbols, memories, and evocations of community and solidarity, and decreased the likelihood that emotional support would be available when needed by individuals.

### **9.3.5. Tom and Peter: An absent presence**

Another noticeable difference between Plumtree and Greenvale was the general absence of senior leadership (namely the head and deputy) within the staffroom. They rarely spent any length of time in the staffroom during break or lunch times. Whilst their absence provided a space for the ridiculing that went on, their distance reinforced one of the key divisions permeating the school, between “them” as senior leaders and “us”, the staff. Further, by not participating and enacting leadership in the staffroom they signalled a detachment from the everyday concerns of staff which seemed to heighten the sense of insecurity experienced by assistants and teachers:

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<sup>68</sup> A popular British soap opera.

On a day-to-day level, I am not sure that [Tom] is aware of how really the staff are feeling. You know, you just pick it up. I'm sure you've picked it. There are a lot of people who are unhappy.

(Fiona, Plumtree-Teacher: IT27-01-05)

A telling illustration of this disconnect between the leadership and the staff can be seen in the following comment from Peter, in stark contrast to the extract from Andre cited earlier in the chapter (see §9.3.3):

[Relationships are] very good, and I make a comparison with other schools, there is no them and us, you know, I've been to schools where there are still separate [staff]rooms or there are separate corners. [Here] everybody is encouraged to work together.

(Peter, Plumtree-Deputy: IT21-02-05)

Tom and Peter's absence from the staffroom contributed to the withering of social bonds between staff and the development of ever-increasing individualism amongst teachers. Their general inattention to the symbolic implications of their actions reinforced the uncertainty and alienation experienced by some staff.

Overall, the interaction rituals inside and outside the staffroom inflected the problematic character of wider institutional social relations, and contributed to their re-production. The consequences of these frayed social bonds were reflected in working-class assistants' alienation from the symbolic, social and cultural order of the school. How assistants and teachers positioned themselves within this fragmenting landscape was key to understanding the symbolic order at Plumtree. At the same time, these very responses – distancing and cynicism by working-class assistants and vocal complaints by middle-class – contributed to the erosion of the trust in the senior leadership and the crisis of Tom's legitimacy and the generation of negative emotions.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has examined the workplace culture at Greenvale and Plumtree, and assistants' contribution to and positioning in this landscape: a key research theme. I have shown the diverse ways workplace culture articulated with the symbolic class forms and experience in the locality, with reference to the contrasting levels of middle-class colonisation in the two schools. This exploration has been largely through the prism of staffroom interaction rituals.

There are a number of marked contrasts between the workplace cultures of the two schools. Broadly speaking, Greenvale's was a cohesive and inclusive landscape in which differences of habitus did not impede TAs from active participation; Plumtree on the other hand had a fragmented, dysfunctional culture characterised by marginalisation on the part of many of the assistants. Regarding informal interaction spaces, staff at Greenvale experienced the staffroom as a central place of release, relaxation and refuge from the role demands of work; for staff at Plumtree, there were few spaces and occasions within the school where they could relax their hold on their emotions and feelings, and vent frustrations.

Humour was a salient feature of the informal interactions at both Greenvale and Plumtree. It is interesting to note the different symbolic forms humour took at each school, and its uses. At Plumtree, humour was used predominantly to articulate dissatisfactions and satirise managerial power. It was not a general resource that was used to produce inclusive interaction rituals; it was relatively restricted in its participants and targets. Whilst the satirical rituals of complaint did facilitate solidarities, these were in the main between specific middle-class staff subgroupings. Rather than constructing broader shared perspectives they tended to alienate some of the working-class assistants, who did not always view the complaints as legitimate or appropriate.

Conversely, whilst at Greenvale satire was sometimes used to chide the pretensions of management, humour overall had a more constructive and consolidating impact generating cross-cutting and fluid solidarities. Humour also generated positive forms of emotional experience. Humorous talk was a conversational resource and form of institutional cultural capital which could be activated at the interpersonal level, and which mediated occupational status relations between TAs and teachers. In their jocular performances, staff at Greenvale frequently drew upon working-class cultural repertoires and speech codes from the neighbourhood, which meant TAs were able to experience the staffroom as a relatively egalitarian space and the staff culture as hybrid and inclusive.

Further, humour made the Greenvale staffroom a place where *pleasurable* expressive identities were produced. It was a source of strength and a key way in which assistants

and teachers symbolically took control of their work situation and managed the demands and pressure on them. The staff's humorous interactions represented a way of being "which amounts to neither conformity nor rebellion, but to a symbolic refashioning of official organizational practices in the interests of pleasure" (Gabriel, 1995: 479). At Plumtree, although some assistants and teachers did draw enjoyment from the mockery of senior leadership, on the whole the emphasis on complaint tended to generate negative emotions. Whilst the content of the derision was a manifestation of frustrations with the status quo, its form was more of a diversion than a constructive challenge to the power structures of the school, and served to erode the legitimacy of the complaints. Humour at Plumtree therefore had more corrosive consequences.

There was also an ideological dimension to the humour at Greenvale. Much of it was ironic and focused on class, providing participants with "insight [that] disrupts power at an ideological level because it symbolically reverses the very foundational discourses of dominant groups" (Fleming and Spicer, 2002: 10). This modality of resistance and its satirical targets connected TAs and teachers' working lives with wider social struggles within the locality. It brought a greater symbolic congruity between where Greenvale stood, its horizontal connections and what it stood *for* (Hall, 1977). We can therefore view Greenvale's workplace culture as enabling assistants and teachers to hold in abeyance the forces of class domination in relation to parents, reinforced by the strong anti-middle-class stance of the head, Bev. Its productive tensions and hybridity enabled middle-class and working-class staff to utilise and draw from a fluid symbolic repertoire in their interactions with each other and pupils.

In contrast, at Plumtree, a school where the effects of neighbourhood gentrification and class-colonisation were already widespread, TAs and some teachers could no longer recognise nor identify with aspects of the workplace culture, and expressed their relation to it in opposition or alienation. Under the omnipotent middle-class gaze, what were intended to be backstage regions became spaces where working-TAs, to paraphrase Goffman (1972: 123), twisted and turned, squirming, under culturally stifling conditions as they were "carried along by the controlling definition of the situation" established by class hegemony. The inadequacies of the staffroom as a backstage region led several assistants and some teachers to seek alternative spaces where they could

interact under what they perceived as less inhibiting conditions. Further, in order to protect and maintain boundaries of selfhood, many TAs, such as Esma, Andre, responded to the impact of class colonisation, low status, and perceived leadership failure, by adopting a detached cynicism. The next chapter concludes the thesis, and discusses the contributions and implications of the study.

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## Chapter 10 – Implications and Discussion

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To understand what happens in places like “projects” or “housing developments” as well as in certain kinds of schools, places which bring together people who have nothing in common and force them to live together, in either ignorance and incomprehension or else in latent open conflict – with all the suffering this entails – it is not enough to explain each point of view separately. All of them must be brought together as they are in reality ... to bring out everything that results when different or antagonistic visions of the world confront each ... where no concession or compromise is possible because each of them is equally founded in social reason. (Bourdieu et al., 1999: 3)

In this study I have set out to present a critical and theoretically informed account of the working lives and positions of teaching assistants within two specific urban primary schools, and in relation to complex contextualised aspects of emerging urban class formations and social relations. I argued that assistants and their work could be explored specifically as the foci of sociological interests in urban schools as intersectional sites of class tensions and struggles. This was motivated by a desire to offer an *alternative* depiction of TAs’ working lives that moves away from the narrow policy framework within which the study of TAs has tended to proceed; and to locate assistants’ work within the wider social contexts of urban education and in so doing problematize the guiding assumptions of the sociocultural mediation literature regarding assistants’ positions within the schools and neighbourhoods in which they work and (some) live. The substantive empirical analysis was thus developed in relation to a number of themes and methodological interests which I reiterate briefly below.

First of these was a focus on the location of urban schools within dynamic and emergent neighbourhood processes of gentrification as class colonisation; second, a concern with exploring assistants’ biographical and professional formations as workers, mothers, residents etc., with reference to neighbourhood contexts, race, ethnicity and class; third, an examination of assistants’ institutional positions, identities and experiences and contributions to the cultural, social, political and symbolic order; and,



fourth, locating the role of headship in negotiating the institutional order and social relations in the context of gentrification. Finally, as argued in chapters 3-4, I wanted to open up a *methodological* space for empirical research supported by critical theory into assistants' work which integrated "the study of education into the much larger concern to comprehend the structure of social processes" in society (Sharp and Green, 1975: 227). In this final chapter, I will present the key findings; then consider the contributions and implications of this study for the literature, some of which has developed since the fieldwork, and conclude by suggesting directions for future research.

### **10.1. Key findings and themes**

This section reviews and summarises the findings of the study in relation to the following themes that address the stated empirical research questions: gentrification and class colonisation; headship; TAs' personal and professional formations; institutional identities and positions in formal structures; work situation; and workplace culture.

#### **10.1.1. Gentrification and class colonisation**

A central theme for this study is how the contexts of gentrification within localities unfold and are articulated within urban schools, and the consequences of social class colonisation – through the organisation of educational work, assistant work, assistant identities and experiences, and headship. This is an integrative theme which emerged during the course of the study in relation to the fieldwork and literature as discussed in the methodology.

Chapter 5 identified two contrasting social, cultural and symbolic formations of social class in the London neighbourhoods of Northwick and Earlsdale. In respect of Northwick, I showed that it was a neighbourhood where successive waves of gentrification by white middle-class groups had managed to produce a distinctive *gentrified habitus*, orientation and sensibility. For this group, Northwick was experienced as a symbolic, cultural and social enclave. An important aspect of this process was the enactment of sociable interaction rituals centred in the field of

consumption. These rituals yielded an emotionally-energising context for the development and expression of cultural styles and identities which communicated interpersonal solidarities and trust in the locality and its symbolisation as a “community” of “people like us”. Further, I suggested that the symbolism of the “English village” provided a powerful cultural class metaphor in framing experiences of the locality. This resulted in a benign sense of Northwick as an “island” or “bubble”, which occluded the working-class presence and claim to Northwick. As such, relations between class groups were characterised by symbolic violence, with the more powerful middle-class asserting their dominant representations of place and hegemonic right to leadership and “community” over others. I contrasted this class location with those of the main working-class groups (black, Turkish-speaking and white) pointing to commonalities of positioning in the fields of employment, housing and education, as well as differences of ethnicity and race.

In contrast to Northwick, the dynamics of gentrification in Earlsdale were more ambiguous and ambivalent. The process of middle-class formation appeared to be less clearly bounded and consolidated. This was in part due to the absence of a consumption infrastructure in which middle-class interaction rituals could be established at that time, a greater diversity in origin of the middle-class, and an alternative class-based cultural form organised around the middle-class valuing of “authenticity” attributed to the locality. Consequently, there was no narrative of incoming middle-class “community” based on strong interpersonal emotional investments and solidarities. Gentrification in Earlsdale was constrained by gentrifiers’ reluctance to mobilise a distinctive presence, preferring instead an ideological position aptly identified by Brown-Saracino (2004) as one of “virtuous marginality” within the locality. Equally, the working-class presence and claim to space in Earlsdale exerted a demonstrable influence on the dominant public cultural styles and interaction rituals, which would have made any transformation of the locality by the middle-class potentially problematic.

I also considered the Carlton estate, which had emerged as a significant context and symbol of the impoverished working-class formation in the neighbourhood. Residualisation of public housing during the 1980s and early 1990s had left a highly

disadvantaged and stigmatised tenant population of predominantly black ethnic groups. I showed how the “regeneration” of the estate – largely through its destruction – under the rubric of dominant public policies of “mixed-communities” brought about a significant socio-tenorial shift which encouraged developer-led and middle-class household gentrification in the wider locality. This resulted in sharp social, cultural and racialised boundaries between the existing black and white working-class fractions and white middle-class gentrifiers.

It was in these contexts that schooling, in the specific cases of Plumtree and Greenvale, was imagined and located within their respective fields of gentrification. The value of Plumtree as a site of colonisation to gentrifiers (particularly amongst newer parents) rested on its assimilation into the dominant images of place and community, of the “English village”. This positioned Plumtree as desirable by virtue of its perceived whiteness and class cultural homogeneity. However, this colonising vision did not go uncontested. Working-class and middle-class parents who held more ideologically progressive views that valued the working-class presence were increasingly marginalised.

In contrast, Greenvale was only beginning to emerge as a desirable school of choice for the gentrifying white middle-class in search of the “authenticity” prized within the locality. Class colonisation did not appear to be actively sought at the time, although there were indications that this situation might be changing by the mid-2000s, towards the end of fieldwork. In any case, chapter 7 documented the resistance offered by the head which constrained any such potential mobilisation. Overall, these key contrasts – between a highly assertive hegemonic middle-class group mobilising around clear and defined symbols of community within Northwick, in relation to Plumtree, and a less assertive and compositionally-complex middle-class group, less cohesive and sure of itself and ambivalent about the locality, seeking forms of community at Greenvale – provided the essential comparative thematic contexts for reporting in subsequent empirical chapters concerning the social class dynamics of assistants’ roles and experiences.

Chapter 6 advanced the theme of class colonisation in relation to the formation of assistants’ habitus and transitions into TA work. It identified two distinct and

contrasting class habitus from assistants' experiences and narratives. Middle-class mothers' transitions and orientations towards assistant work reflected the dominant positions of the gentrified habitus in the social space and thus marked the insertion of their power into Plumtree. From this perspective assistant work was a key resource in constructing forms of belonging and community life. In contrast, working-class TA informants tended to occupy marginalised or dominated positions in that social space. Their orientations towards TA work were often pragmatic and grounded in their taken-for-granted experiences of place. I also highlighted the importance of heads in mediating opportunities for assistant work. Overall, this chapter underlined the class-based nature of the place of assistant work in the negotiation of social relations/exchanges between schools and their urban localities and the interconnections between neighbourhood and personal formations.

Chapter 7 explored assistants' work situation and headship in relation to class colonisation. It showed how the pressures that middle-class parents placed on the two schools influenced the way teachers organised their work, with ramifications for the division of labour within the classroom. This was connected to assistants' roles through their contribution to the differentiation of learners in terms of "ability", constructs of classroom deviance, and the structuring of pedagogic opportunities.

I then examined the role of headship and leadership style in the dynamics of middle-class colonisation. Far from being a one-sided process of class domination as depicted in the existing literature, I showed that school colonisation was a negotiated and contested process shaped by the contexts and realisations of headship. Plumtree and Greenvale presented two clearly distinct enactments of headship and leadership style. Tom was seen by gentrifiers as open to, and encouraging of, middle-class mobilisation in the school, whilst Bev exerted strong leadership in her practical and ideological wariness and opposition to middle-class parental interference and had (thus far) succeeded in insulating the school against colonisation. These two particular forms of headship established differing boundary relations between the school and its extra-institutional limits and contexts.

Chapters 8 and 9 focused on the intra-institutional inflections of boundary relations and considered how middle-class power came to penetrate the formal and informal

order within the two schools, and the part played by middle-class assistants. Chapter 8 demonstrated that Plumtree middle-class assistants' identities and solidarities in the parental field shaped their participation in the structures of power, providing them with alternative (albeit still relatively limited) opportunities and resources for micro-political influence, which created an unsettled and alienating context for working-class assistants. Further, this made the institutional order increasingly permeable to middle-class parental action. In contrast, at Greenvale, strongly-framed boundaries generated an ambiguous positioning for middle-class assistants' in relation to the power of the head.

The final empirical chapter integrated these themes through the topographies of workplace culture. Greenvale workplace culture was characterised by humour, which provided a valued resource that supported an ideological, emotionally-charged symbolic opposition to middle-class colonisation. Here, workplace culture offered a critical interactional and symbolic space of marginality. Further, the head's influence as a cultural exemplar shaped how assistants experienced and contributed to the production of this fluid topography, which operated through a *consolidating friction*. In contrast, at Plumtree, class colonisation generated an ambiguous, stifling and problematic context for informal interaction rituals, particularly for working-class assistants and some teachers, which contributed to a fragmented cultural and symbolic disorder.

### **10.1.2. Headship**

A key theme integrating the dynamics of the social relations depicted in the emergent analysis is the role of headship and its contexts. Heads are critical negotiators of class colonisation processes and define the key parameters of educational work, and institutional realities in general, for assistants and teachers. At Plumtree, the contexts of headship were constrained by a number of factors. First, the departure of the previous head generated uncertainty of expectations (for staff and parents) where there had been strong insulating boundaries between the school and powerful middle-class parents. Secondly, during the current deputy's brief interim headship, the school began to encourage middle-class mobilisation within the school, reflected in the offering of employment opportunities to highly-involved parents. His actions were

guided by the notion that privatised middle-class resources (or surplus value) could be *socialised* for the *common good* of the school and “community”. This contributed to a context in which middle-class parents’ forms of engagement were symbolically recognised and valued, usurping alternative forms of value embodied by working-class parents.

A third factor identified was the current head’s relative inexperience, particularly as regards the specific construction of home-school relations at Plumtree. This made it difficult for him to realise his own agenda against the demands made on him by middle-class parents. His leadership style and expressivity within social interactions signalled an openness to influence from agents in the parental field and governing body. Thus the head came to be seen by assistants and teachers as “weak”, as someone who could be dominated, particularly by parents. As such, he was unable to provide a stable context for educational work and prevent incursion from outside. His legitimacy with staff was eroded and this generated circulating negative emotions which inflected informal and formal interactions. Further, his mismanagement of support staff meetings contributed to their failure and encouraged a distrust of headship power. Equally, he was largely absent from informal social interactions, which reinforced the tendency for backstage regions to be used to express criticism. Consequently assistants felt alienated and distanced from school leadership.

At Greenvale, the contexts of headship were markedly different. The school had experienced continuity of leadership, with the head accruing symbolic capital from the demonstrated academic achievement at the school. Further, her headship was enacted through a highly effective realisation of leadership style that displayed high levels of expressive control within interaction rituals. Equally, the head’s professional orientation towards the working-class infused the parental field with a different sensibility and recognition of value to that at Plumtree. Assistant work was viewed by the head as a way of exerting a pedagogic function within the locality, while offering opportunities for working-class participation and possible betterment. Consequently, middle-class mobilisation was significantly curtailed and even met with antagonism. This adversarial stance, in concert with the relative ambivalence of the Earlsdale middle-class, generated a context in which the head’s symbolic power to define the agenda

and realities of the school was never hegemonised by parents. Consequently, opportunities for *any* formation or expression of parental voice at the school were limited. This in turn reinforced the head's symbolic power in relation to staff who valued her capacity to protect their work situation and give stable meanings to their actions.

Chapter 7 showed that a disciplined sense of direction was established and conveyed to assistants through Bev's regular attendance at support staff meetings. Her presence communicated the legitimate place of assistants within the institutional order. However, her confrontational and authoritarian leadership style made dissent or challenge to the authority structures difficult and unlikely. This highlighted the *undemocratic* aspect of her headship. Bev's symbolic capital was realised also in informal interactions in the staffroom, as highlighted in chapter 9. I showed that her orientation to working-class symbolic forms (e.g. swearing, humour, speech) contributed towards a fluid cultural topography in which assistants felt included and valued.

Finally, there was also an interesting gender dimension to headship. The different leadership styles enacted at each school were viewed through the prism of gendered expectations. Tom's diffident demeanour was viewed by many as "feminine" and therefore indicative of his "weakness" as a leader. His inability to marshal enough symbolic capital to transform the image of him held by staff and some parents contributed to the ineffectiveness of his headship. Equally, Bev's confident presentation of self to middle-class parents fostered the impression of her as "overly" confrontational or adversarial. Her capacity to deploy both traditionally masculine and feminine cultural styles enabled Bev to effectively position herself as caring, and as "tough" and assertive when required. Each head therefore had a contrasting leadership style that ran counter to dominant gender stereotypes of leadership, and with different consequences.

Overall, these findings underline the importance of the theme of headship in relation to assistants, since their employment is one of the key ways in which heads establish and endorse their relations with the wider locality.

### **10.1.3. Teaching assistants' personal and professional formation**

Understanding the social relations of gentrification through the work of TAs requires attention to assistants' trajectories, transitions and transpositions into TA work. This is an important theme of the thesis and was signalled in the review of the literature in chapter 2. This found that differences between assistants generally remained unexamined. There was also an assumption that assistants were predominantly working-class and had relatively unproblematic relations to the localities of the schools in which they worked, and the cultural and symbolic order. Even though they were viewed as class cultural mediators, their own classed lives remained outside of this frame. This study demonstrates that, in complex ways, individuals' identities, gender, trajectories and positions within various fields produce differentiated transitions and orientations to assistant work. Further, transitions and interpolations into TA work and roles were shaped not only by informants' agency and resources, but the employment opportunities offered by heads, and the construction of the parental field.

Chapter 6 sought to demonstrate that assistant work can be understood in relation to individuals' personal and occupational formations of class, race/ethnicity, gender and locality as manifested in the development of the *habitus*. I identified two ideal-type class habitus which were differentiated by race/ethnicity and gender. My analysis of the narratives of 22 working-class informants illustrated their relatively disadvantaged backgrounds, often of material constraint, in which the habitus was developed. Many of these informants experienced educational marginalisation which was transposed into precarious positions in the employment field. There were others who managed to craft secure vocationally-oriented careers. For these individuals, there appeared to be a greater congruence of the habitus of dispositions, and the opportunities for their activation in employment. This was most evident amongst black men, who most embodied a habitus of vocation working with marginalised youth. In contrast, the first group responded to the constraints of their lives with diminished agency in relation to their dominated position in the social space. In terms of the *transitions* of working-class informants into assistant work, these varied between, broadly, those who made the transition from other jobs/careers, as *workers*, and those who made the transition from



their positions as *parents* in relation to the school. Individuals manifesting these dispositions, orientations and trajectories had traditionally been the dominant group amongst assistants in both schools.

However, this was changing, as illustrated, with the contrasting narratives of white middle-class assistants. Their habitus pointed to more advantaged class backgrounds, positive educational careers and settled positions in the world of work. Through waged work, these women were able to activate and develop various dispositions and forms of organisationally-incorporated capital (self-confidence, skills etc.). As *parents* and *mothers*, they entered the orbit of Plumtree and took up dominant positions in the field, and it was in this context that assistant work emerged as an immanent transition to make. At Plumtree, being a middle-class mother was seen as embodying value, whilst this symbolic economy was challenged at Greenvale. These differences were attributable, in part, to the different ideological orientations of the heads.

Motherhood emerged as a crucial social class structuring context for many women, transforming their identities and activating new dispositions. It generated a felt tension between commitments to work and newly-acquired identities and caring responsibilities. These challenges were negotiated differently by working-class and middle-class mothers. Several of the working-class women experienced mothering as entrenching their social isolation and gendered marginalisation. Others managed to sustain a commitment to their work identities as well as their mothering; this was particularly evident in relation to black women. Amongst middle-class women, mothering was a significant source of agency in the formal settings of the school and a resource in the construction of neighbourhood interpersonal bonds. Overall, these findings highlight the complex ways class interpolated TAs' lives, the diverse concerns and motivations of individuals who took up assistant posts, and the constraints and opportunities which shaped their lives. Equally, it points to the importance of race/ethnicity and gender in understanding assistants' occupational formation. Further, this theme demonstrated the dynamic and complex nature of the neighbourhood – both as a structuring context for the development TAs' habitus and a resource in the construction of *belonging* (and thereby motivating action).

#### 10.1.4. TAs' work situation

TAs' work situation has primarily been viewed through the prism of classroom pedagogy. This study has offered a different perspective, as part of documenting assistants' lived experience of work in chapter 7. I pointed to the temporal and spatial constraints which structured assistants' work, the shaping influence of the habitus, and equally important, teachers' more authoritative expectations and roles as order-givers in classroom rituals. The result was a high degree of situational conformity. In terms of the division of labour, these rituals generated interpersonal solidarities which created felt obligations. Amongst female assistants in particular, for whom gendered notions of care as self-sacrifice resonated, this led them to take on a more expansive role. Men, in contrast, resisted undertaking what they considered as *discreditable* tasks that would undermine their performances of masculinity. These gender assumptions and expectations underlined classroom interaction rituals and opened female assistants to overwork and exploitation.

I then explored assistants' pupil focus in relation to teachers' accomplishment of classroom control and pedagogic activities. I suggested that assistants' work activities enabled teachers to resolve the dilemmas and demands placed on them – by the National Curriculum, the perceived polarised “ability” of pupils, and middle-class parents – for greater differentiation between learners. Consequently, assistants' focus tended to be those pupils who were viewed as problematic to the teachers' competence and limited resources of time and energy. For black male TAs, there was often a focus on black boys, who were viewed from the classroom perspective as embodying “deviant” or problematic masculinities. These findings suggest that the assistants' pedagogic action is constrained, not only by the routines of classroom experience and organisation, as previously thought – and which this study further elaborates – but also by the operations of the habitus, gender and the relational identities of teachers, pupils and assistants. The consequences were an ambivalent and ambiguous positioning for assistants.

### **10.1.5. TAs' identities and positions in the formal/informal institutional structures**

The literature explored in chapter 2 highlighted assistants' often problematic and alienated positions within the informal and formal structures dominated by teachers in urban schools. It was suggested that assistants and teachers had few or no common occupational interests *outside* of the classroom because of their different cultural styles and (non-professional) backgrounds. Previous studies have neglected to focus on how schools as institutions shape what are seen as occupational "interests" and provide opportunities for voice. There have been few explorations of how assistants access, participate in and contribute to the various mechanisms and processes, informal and formal, that influence the institutional order. This study adds nuance and specificity to existing depictions via an analysis of support staff meetings and staffroom interactions in chapters 7 and 8. As recurrent interaction rituals, meetings provided a key institutional mechanism of legitimation, information exchange, the negotiation of involvement in decision-making processes, and the articulation and expression of collective voice and identities. The role of heads and other leaders emerged as an important dimension of this theme.

At Plumtree support staff meetings were highly problematic, and the failure to gain institutional support and resourcing for them contributed to a deepening of institutional divides between senior leadership and assistants, generating feelings of marginalisation and frustration. The head's absence from meetings further eroded his legitimacy in assistants' eyes and engendered cynicism, particularly amongst working-class assistants. For some, mainly middle-class assistants, frustration led to subversive backstage political expression. I also highlighted middle-class assistants' dominant positions as *interlocutors* of TAs' collective voice, and the way this further differentiated them institutionally from other workers. In contrast, at Greenvale, the right to representation was established and supported by senior leadership. Assistants perceived themselves as occupying a legitimated position, though with limited opportunities to participate in substantive decision-making processes within the school's political structures. The head's confrontational leadership style made serious expressions of dissent difficult, but this did not generate the same quality and scale of

dissatisfaction. In both schools, the practice of having *separate* support staff meetings was not challenged.

With regard to the informal order, I examined TAs' positions in, and contributions to, the re-production of the workplace culture, with specific reference to interaction rituals within the staffrooms of each school. The research literature on TAs has had relatively little to say on what difference assistants' presence makes to the symbolic order as it is experienced by staff. The workplace culture at Greenvale was characterised by humour, which functioned as a valued interpersonal resource amongst assistants and teachers in negotiating their encounters. This in turn sustained a collegial and supportive ethos. I showed that this humour – and the kinds of interaction rituals it facilitated – was articulated with working-class symbolic and cultural repertoires, which created a fluid and inclusive cultural landscape. Within this symbolic order, working-class assistants were able to craft and express pleasurable identities. Humour also provided ideological positions from which staff could contest, oppose and observe the wider social scene.

In contrast, workplace culture at Plumtree was fragmented. This inflected a sense of institutional disorder connected to the crisis of the head's legitimacy and the penetration of middle-class power. The uncertainties generated by class colonisation left many TAs (and some teachers) unable or unwilling to identify with aspects of the workplace culture, which they expressed through alienation to mainstream sites of social interaction such as the staffroom. Consequently the basic social bonds of interpersonal solidarity were frayed. Humour was also a facet of Plumtree's cultural apparatus, used primarily to ridicule senior leadership, but whilst this generated interpersonal solidarities between specific groupings of middle-class assistants and teachers, it tended to reinforce cultural divisions, thereby contributing to the sense of disorder infusing the school. Humour therefore had corrosive consequences, and did little to foment a challenge to parental power. In contrast, at Greenvale the workplace cultural repertoire provided a *consolidating friction* which encompassed the lived tensions of the wider neighbourhood space. This was reflected in the experiences of middle-class TAs, who occupied ambivalent positions within the cultural landscape of Greenvale.

Overall, my findings indicate that assistants occupy complex and differentiated positions and the voice they communicate and relay through the informal and formal structures is informed by their class habitus, use of institutional repertoires (e.g. complaints or humour), and motivating solidarities generated within interaction rituals. These positions arise from negotiated opportunities with management and teachers. TAs and teachers can and do develop common “interests” and orientations which frame their on-going work and social interactions. I showed that middle-class assistants were more able to realise the benefits of opportunities to participate and act within this formal institutional ritual. Consequently, for them greater participation in the structures of power increased the confusion between their worker perspective and parental identities and solidarities. In respect of informal interactions my findings here suggest that the in/exclusion of assistants within workplace cultures was multifaceted.

## **10.2. Discussion and implications**

Having outlined the key findings above, I will now discuss and reflect on the methodological, theoretical and practical implications of the study; then, consider the limitations and possible directions for future research.

### **10.2.1. Theoretical framework and methodological approach**

This thesis makes a case for the heuristic value of the synthetic critical theoretical framework developed in chapter 2 to the study of TAs’ working lives. The relationship between the empirical and theoretical aspects of this study should be thought of as an integrative whole. As Bourdieu observed of his own work: “one cannot think well except in and through theoretically constructed empirical cases ... and these [conceptual] tools are only visible through the results they yield” (1992: 160). The framework and tools of this study consist of a number of interconnected concepts – namely habitus, fields, capitals, field, interaction ritual and cultural style – derived from the sociological works of Bourdieu, Goffman and Collins. Deploying these concepts, as this study demonstrates, can illuminate social life in a non-reductive manner, integrating a concern for structuration and the unequal distribution of resources with an ethnographic sensibility which emphasises the lived realm of actions and meanings.

Whilst the habitus (and by implication cultural style) of a group points to the unequal social structuring of collective dispositions and orientation, these can be, and are, flexibly enacted, and responsive to situated expectations generated within interaction rituals. In turn, rituals produce emotionally-motivated agency and identities embedded in roles and their performances. As Erickson observes:

Goffman described the encounter or situation as partially bounded, with a semipermeable membrane between itself and the wider social order. The trope of a membrane with fluid on either side was suggestive and cryptic. It pointed toward connections of mutual influence between differing levels or aspects of social ecology; between the local interaction order and the global social order. (2004: 155-156)

The micro-sociological approach and that of Bourdieu therefore each complement and enhance the insights of the other. This is illustrated by TAs' classroom interactions with teachers in chapter 7, which were highly constrained and unequal, irrespective of the habitus. I highlighted the strong demand for situational conformity present within the classroom order. I argued that to understand fully what is happening in classrooms, we need to consider the habitus, and in this case, its gendered dispositions and feminine capital, which made female assistants generally more subject and receptive to teachers' authoritative (and gendered) expectations, as well as the demands of the audience (i.e. pupils). In contrast some male assistants were able to resist aspects of the division of labour in the classroom by appealing to the *discrediting* character of menial work in relation to the pupils, which enabled them to mobilise masculine capital. This showed how ritual constraints specify the kinds of identities that are considered legitimate within classrooms for assistants and teachers alike. Thus the notion of individual agency is not conflated with the operations of the habitus and its structural acquired predispositions. Rather the habitus provides the generative structure and discursive space for agency; identities are expressed performatively through roles within interaction rituals.

Further, the concepts of the theoretical framework enable a focus on culture and action through the lens of power – making it an object of empirical study – the forms it takes, and its consequences for those who are subtly and overtly oppressed by it (Carspecken, 1996). Attention was given to specifying class processes of colonisation at various ontologically *real* levels of analysis – the neighbourhood structure, the

subjective, and the interpersonal level of face-to-face interaction and talk. It is a framework which is supportive to *critical* theorising. According to Bourdieu, the task of critical sociological theory is to “denaturalize and to defatalize the social world, that is, to destroy the myths that cloak the exercise of power and the perpetuation of domination” (1992: 49-50). This unmasking function of critical theory is both its strength and difficulty. The difficulty lies in explicating how judgments of analysis are arrived at, how the wider structural contexts are shown to articulate with agents’ own actions and expectations articulating macro-/micro-/meso-contexts.

The characterisation of Tom’s headship is a good illustration of the analytical challenges this can present. As documented in chapters 6 to 8, the overwhelming impression of Tom given by assistants and teachers was that of an ineffective head who was largely responsible for the problematic aspects of their work situation. During the fieldwork, it was difficult to maintain distance from these perceptions and constructs. My own initial judgements of Tom’s behaviour and interactions strongly paralleled those made by informants, as I was socialised into their perspectives. In reconstructing this *emic* perspective, I showed how the meanings of Tom’s headship were constituted through intersubjectively generative expectations, and how these in turn shaped orientations towards specific situations, and the range of actions that assistants and others perceived as being possible for them (Carspecken and Georgiou, 2002). This demonstrated that agency is located in the *constitutive* domain of Goffman and Collins’s interaction rituals. The critical theory advanced in this study goes beyond this necessary level of analysis. It examines how “people’s activities produce consequences of functional significance for the social orders in which they live” and of which they “need not be aware” (Carspecken and Georgiou, 2002: 691). This requires sensitivity – aided by theory – to the wider contexts of actions, beyond agents’ intersubjectivities and constructs; in essence, “a language of distance, of irony, of imagination” (Ball, 1995: 267). In Tom’s case, this theoretical understanding came later in the analysis, after the fieldwork, where data from different contexts and other materials concerning wider structural conditions could be integrated. Only then was I able to develop a more textured and revised account which located Tom’s actions in relation to middle-class parents’ mobilisation, the prior contexts of headship at Plumtree, his own professional formation and dispositions, and the unequal distributions of power available to

different individuals. Thus I came to view more clearly the constraints under which he acted, the parameters of negotiability, the ideological uses particular characterisations of him might serve (e.g. to divert attention from increasingly individualistic action by staff etc.) and the staff's own complicity. Another, example, would be the way that middle-class mothers' parental engagement and *class-work* as assistants, whilst benign in intent, was revealed not only to have exclusionary consequences for working-class TAs, but to contribute to the re-production of a fragmented institutional order, of which they were highly critical.

In deploying this critical framework heuristically, the aim of analysis is "not so much [as to] do away with social structure or an inner mental life ... [but to] respecify the relationship of the interaction order to 'larger' distal formations, such as institutions" (Zimmerman, 2007: 219). From a strictly Bourdieusian perspective, one might view the *emic* level of meaning and action as somewhat epistemologically insubstantial. Reay's ethnographic study of parental involvement in two schools located in contrasting class locales is illuminating in this regard. She argued that class domination by middle-class parents in one of the schools "operated beneath a veneer of civility and good manners" (1995: 368). This suggests that the observed polite and genteel interactions were somewhat epiphenomenal to the ontologically *real* class processes "underneath", which were revealed by Bourdieusian analysis. However, as I showed, particularly in relation to Plumtree, a "veneer" of politeness can be a significant part of the cultural topography through which class is expressed and negotiated, because of the cooperative work of jointly defining interpersonal realities within interaction rituals. As Collins suggests, individuals' need "to take part in the work of keeping up the impression of reality" is an important constraint and enabler of action (2004: 21). Social exchanges, particularly within institutional contexts, are:

a kind of theatrical performance; both sides generally know what is real or unreal about the situation; both put up with it, as long as the show of respect is maintained. The show of cooperation is the situational performance through which conflicting interests are tacitly managed. (2004: 21)

In these respects class power does not take place "beneath" its performances, but rather these performances are constitutive of the forms it takes. For example, at Greenvale, conflict and power in general were negotiated through what were often



impolite and confrontational forms of interaction. Further, attention to the interactional domain illuminates how people develop emotionally motivating bonds that “are crucial to building reputations, developing alliances and building organizations” and identities (Inglis, 2010: 513). The kind of theoretical synthesis advanced here is increasingly seen as having the potential to address the neglect of situational and institutional realities within Bourdieu’s theoretical model of social space by drawing upon the insights of symbolic interaction – in particular the emphasis on meaning, relationships, situational definition and processes of mutual influence (e.g. Atkinson, 2010; Bottero and Crossley, 2011; Santoro, 2011). As Santoro points out:

A mediating term is needed to account for the great variety of practices in the same field and with respect to very similar habitus. This is ‘situation’, strangely omitted by Bourdieu, especially considering the close relation between Bourdieu and Goffman, the sociologist who more than any other defined ‘situations’ as a key category for sociological analysis. ‘Situation’ seems a necessary middle term between habitus and field. People never act directly in fields, but always in field-specific situations, or in situations embedded at the intersection of (usually many) fields. (2011: 14)

The concept of interaction ritual therefore adds *depth* and *nuance* to Bourdieu’s own critical theory. This study has shown that the concept of interaction ritual is a plausible candidate for such a “*mediating term*” and worthy of further development.

An important concern for this study, and for critical research in general, is the cultural representation of class. Representation can be a key site where class is re-inscribed and symbolic violence exerted (Skeggs, 2004c). I noted in chapter 2 that some of the gentrification literature has tended to proceed from a narrow and limiting focus on middle-class perspectives and experiences. Academics, often gentrifiers themselves and sharing a similar ethnic and cultural habitus, have found it easy to represent and *reproduce* middle-class perspectives, as Butler and Hamnett acknowledge:

Undoubtedly, over the last 20 years too many glasses of chardonnay have been shared between researcher and gentrifier and this has probably led to a telling of the story of the city as that seen by the middle classes. (2009: 221)

In contrast, I have shown that the urban working-classes are present in the schools and other public institutions of the urban locations being gentrified. In order to explain what is happening in these contexts, I adopted an emergent class relational method

which attempted to integrate the perspectives of both groups, and explicate the “habitus of the gentrified working class as well as that of the middle-class gentrifiers” (Watt, 2008: 209). However, representing working-class voices and experiences relationally is fraught with difficulties. As Ball (2003: 3) notes, the research process itself and the forms of talk it engenders provide an advantageous context for the performance of middle-class identities as cultural capital:

the middle class gets things done at home, work and in engagement with “expert systems” through talk of a particular sort. They represent and perform themselves as moral subjects, as efficacious social actors and as classed agents, through talk.

These issues, on reflection, were evident from my earliest fieldwork interactions. I remember one of my first conversations with Ruth, a working-class TA at Plumtree: she seemed puzzled that anyone would be interested in studying TAs and their work. Further, she did not perceive any value in her experiences nor see them as a potential resource for narration. As Skeggs notes, “The resources and techniques necessary to self-formation and self-telling are not equally available. Yet, if research is being judged to be legitimate on the basis of self-telling, we can see how research methods themselves constitute class difference[s]” (2004a: 134).

Since I undertook this study, some of the original literature to which I intended to contribute has itself developed. The “funds of knowledge” approach, which was important in forging my theoretical orientation towards assistant work, has itself begun to move in similar theoretical directions to those outlined in this study, addressing some of its lacunae. There has been an engagement with Bourdieusian concepts of social space and capitals in relation to the original sociocultural focus on the embedded resources within households and communities and their use for pedagogical action by assistants and teachers (Rios-Aguilar *et al.*, 2011). There is a greater emphasis on tracking the conversion and transformation of household resources as it moves through the different contexts of “community” and school. As Rios-Aguilar *et al.* argue, the key challenge for the approach is “to understand funds of knowledge within the context of [Bourdieu’s] capital ... [and] explore how power dynamics within educational settings influence the conversion or transformation process” and pedagogical action (Rios-Aguilar *et al.*, 2011: 164). The theoretically exemplified analysis

of this thesis suggests that paying closer attention to the role of staff habitus, cultural style and interaction rituals in institutional life promises to shed considerable light on how cultural forms are constructed and transacted between the educational and neighbourhood contexts, and how this is manifested in the dialectical interplay between micro-processes of individual behaviour and presentations of self, and the distribution of structural and embodied resources (e.g. Hallett, 2003 ; Hallett, 2007).

### **10.2.2. Class colonisation and urban schooling**

This study makes a number of contributions to the literature on class colonisation and urban schooling. Grace argued that “the schools of the urban working class ... [are] inextricably associated with conflict – of class and culture, of ideologies and social processes” (1978: 29). My findings show that this continues to be the case. However, urban schools are no longer unassailable “citadels of a dominant order and culture” (Grace, 1978: 29); rather, in the present, they are the focus of activated class struggles for educational opportunities, belonging, and social advantage within an increasingly marketised educational system (Ball, 2007; Oría *et al.*, 2007).

To recap: according to Butler and Robson (2003a), class colonisation is best described as an educational class strategy of intergenerational social reproduction prevalent amongst culturally-endowed fractions of the white middle-class in urban neighbourhoods, whereby social capital is realised in networks which enhance and “collectivise” the individual cultural capital of households. Such class action, and the associated habitus, is dependent on/constitutive of class consciousness or “collective awareness”, as well as an ideological narrative of “equality of opportunity and meritocracy” (2003a: 73). As the process unfolds, middle-class presence and action signals and activates further involvement, increasing the visibility and desirability of a school to the wider field of gentrification, which reinforces existing circulations of cultural capital in activated social networks (2006: 4-6). Class colonisation therefore appears inevitable and hegemonic as a monolithic process, in which schools as institutions can do little but acquiesce in the face of a mobilised middle-class. In contrast, I have argued that class colonisation is a complex, *emergent, relational, negotiated, and contested* process of transformation. As a process, it *disrupts* the established social order and has consequences for educational work, the identities and

emotional well-being of staff within schools (in particular TAs), the organisation of educational work and headship, as well as for how class struggles in general are constituted.

First, my findings indicate that class colonisation is the outcome of complex and *emergent* processes in the wider field of gentrification. That is to say *space* matters. Whilst concurring with Butler and Robson's argument that class mobilisation *depends* on class identity or class consciousness, I would emphasise its basis in the solidarities generated from sociable interaction rituals within the neighbourhood. Interaction rituals, particularly those in public spaces of consumption, provide the performative contexts in which emotionally-affecting place-based middle-class identities can emerge, and generate the symbolic forms which can be deployed in service of ideological investments in the production of gentrified neighbourhoods. It is in relation to what Appadurai calls "locality building" that a "moment of colonisation" occurs, and there is "a formal recognition that the production of a neighbourhood requires deliberate, risky ... action" (1996: 183). This process concerns desire by middle-class parents for particular schools and aversion to others, as I highlighted.

To say that class colonisation is a *relational* process is to argue that the gentrified habitus must be explicated relationally, with reference to how the same neighbourhood is understood and experienced by working-class groups. Middle-class claims to territory and space must be viewed dialectically as part of wider struggles with other groups within the urban milieu. As Watt suggests, we must represent working-class perspectives within urban neighbourhoods "not just as the demonic, phantasmic 'other' in urban middle-class imaginations, *but also in reality in the workplaces, schools and housing estates of the metropolis*" (2008: 209, emphasis added). This means also attending to the relational differences of race/ethnicity and gender within the working-class experience.

White middle-class mobilisation as part of class colonisation has to be *negotiated* through the available opportunities to act, existing understandings and expectations, and prior interactions between urban schools and the various social groups in the neighbourhood. One of the reasons middle-class parents were able to reconfigure social relations at Plumtree was the *opportunity* presented by a new headship, and the

uncertainty generated during the transitional period. In order for middle-class mobilisation to occur, there must be recognition and valuing of the cultural capital of the white middle-classes by significant institutional agents such as heads. It is not sufficient that they exert dominance within the parental field over other parents, although this would seem to be a corollary. The parental arena must also articulate in specific ways which enhance or increase the opportunities for middle-class parents to legitimise their forms of capital. This is a complex and often protracted process which is framed by the negotiated contexts of headship, and by the capacity of middle-class groups to activate and dramatise their social power in interaction rituals with school staff. Further, there may be significant ideological differences amongst white middle-class parents which influence the capacity and dispositions for mobilisation.

Achieving hegemony through deference (i.e. symbolic power) is a fluid process, and may be countered, as occurred at Greenvale, by the adroit leadership style of the head. The thesis thus makes an important case for viewing heads as key mediators of class colonisation. Through their powerful position as institutional leaders, heads have the potential to obstruct, *contest*, resist, facilitate and define forms of capital operative in the parental field or other adjacent spheres of power that interface with the school (such as the governing body and Local Authority). An important factor is the ideological position and practice of heads in relation to other key agents and agencies such as urban planners, property developers etc., who are involved in altering the ideological and material conditions of the neighbourhood to make it amenable for middle-class lifestyles. At Plumtree, under Peter's leadership, the school sought an ideological alignment with the middle-classes, seeking to co-opt their resources to address working-class disadvantage, whereas at Greenvale, Bev challenged the basis of the middle-class claims to the city and shaping of the educational agenda.

This study indicates that class colonisation can have *disruptive* consequences for how educational work is organised, the distribution of pedagogic opportunities, and assistants and teachers' identities. As Bernstein noted: "power always operates to produce dislocations, to produce punctuations in social space" (2000: 19). The sense of fragmentation and disorder experienced through hegemonic class colonisation resonates with the key classic sociological theme of *anomie*. Durkheim argued that

when a society or institution faced a painful crisis, often caused by rapid social transformations of power, the morale of the existing normative regulation and cultural order may no longer hold sway. This creates a sense of moral and cultural *disorder*: anomie. Anomie is a condition of normlessness or the suspension of the institutional or social rules which guide and give meaning to action (Durkheim, 1897/2006; Merton, 1967). In such a context, Durkheim argued: “No one knows what is possible and what is impossible what is just and what unjust, what constitute legitimate demands and hopes, and which are those that exceed the boundaries” (1897/2006: 277). Transforming a school in a hegemonic fashion, as Plumtree illustrated, creates permeable boundaries between parental and institutionally-defined social class contexts. This generates opportunities for the transposition and performance of identities, flows of informational capital and other resources. The resulting ambiguity and disturbance of the institutional order provides windows for parental action, which reconfigure established boundaries. At the same time, fluid and ambiguous boundaries make it increasingly difficult for staff to establish backstage arenas that enable them to effectively manage work pressures. This determines the kinds of interactions amongst staff that are possible and their capacity to develop collective symbolic representations of their shared experiences and the basic bonds of interpersonal trust.

Existing accounts of class colonisation have generally omitted the actions and perspectives of school staff. Overall, the present study addresses this missing institutional dimension, by focusing on the forms of agency operative within schools (as layered institutions) and their material, cultural, social and ideological basis. It highlights the ways in which middle-class power can be transposed institutionally through assistants’ actions, contributing to the monopolisation and hoarding of opportunities to *participate* and *shape* collective interests at school. This can be seen as contributing to what Sayers (2011) refers to as “contributive” injustice: “what people are allowed, expected or required to *do* or contribute” (2011: 9). This is an important injustice, because as Sayer points out, what “we do depends significantly on what we are allowed and required to do according to our social situation and the main institutions in which we live. Socialization requires repeated practical involvement” (2011: 9).

### 10.2.3. Workplace culture

This thesis also makes an important contribution to the explication of the class basis of workplace culture in urban schools and assistants' contribution to it. I show that school or workplace culture is not synonymous with what is often referred to as "teacher culture" (Hargreaves, 1997; Stoll, 1999). Schools are workplaces for significant other staff groups, including TAs. In this context workplace culture is a process which draws from the expressive repertoires of assistants and teachers in a manner which is responsive to, in part constitutive of, and articulates with, the social class contexts of schooling. At Plumtree this connected strongly with middle-class cultural forms in problematic ways, as already discussed. In contrast, Greenvale exemplified an altogether different cultural topography that resembled in significant respects the "shop-floor" subcultures reported in studies of predominantly working-class all-male industrial settings. Willis has argued that what is central to this kind of organisational form is the creativity individuals display as they seek, through symbolic means, to "repossess, symbolically and really, aspects of their experience and capacities" (1979: 109-110). This tradition of analysis has highlighted humour, swearing, found in masculine working-(class) organisational cultures as exemplars of subcultures of resistance. For example, Collinson's (1988) study of an all-male lorry-making factory; Daly *et al.*'s (2004) work on male workers in a soap factory; and Baruch and Jenkins's (2007) study of male workers in a mail-order warehouse. These studies describe how humorous social interactions and swearing are used to resist boredom, drudgery and managerial power and control, whilst simultaneously shaping and policing expressions of masculinity, as well as exerting control over work effort and the division of labour, in this case in a work context not assumed to be proletarian. The case of Greenvale also illustrates that workplace culture can be used, in Willis' terms, as "penetrations", as a creative resource for "thinking with" (2000: 35). These penetrations enable members of a group or institution to symbolically hold in abeyance or counteract forms of class domination. They constitute the creation of liminal, fluid cultural spaces and class positionality: a hybridity that I referred to as a *consolidating friction*. This enabled the school as an institution to engage productively with conflict and difference (Achinstein, 2002a, 2002b). Willis, again, is helpful here:

penetrative resources and forms ... arise from creative explorations and re-articulations of received dominant social codes and representations: working-class/middle-class, black/white, male/female. Binaries can be played off against each other ... or ironically positioned to reveal third terms. Contradictions, gaps and ill-fitting overlaps can be exploited and levered against each other. (2000: 37)

This fluidity was framed by strong insulating boundaries of control between the school and the social groups outside, in particular the middle-class, and thus reflected the manner in which class struggle was conducted by the head. In contrast, at Plumtree, there was an emphasis on informality *between* contexts, a modality of interaction typical of Bernstein's (1975a) "new" middle-class fractions in which boundaries are weakly framed between the school and its extra-institutional relations. This was reflected in the laissez-faire educational pedagogies supported by these parents and no less constitutive of class struggle. At the same time, occupational and symbolic boundaries between assistants and teachers appeared to be stronger than at Greenvale. This highlights the complex ways in which the informal and formal are constructed. Further explorations of TAs' contributions and positions promises therefore to enrich our understanding of school workplace cultures and how they articulate with the symbolic class dimensions of education/schooling.

#### **10.2.4. Race/ethnicity and urban governance**

Whilst it has not been a primary focus of this study, it is clear that issues of race as well as class are significant in processes of class colonisation, in particular "whiteness". Butler and Robson have observed that: "the issue of ethnicity is rarely raised in relation to gentrification. ... The apparent [racial] homogenisation of the gentrification process is an important, yet neglected aspect of the metropolitan habitus" (Butler and Robson, 2003a: 172). Middle-class groups have ideological investments in whiteness and the privileges it confers which often go unexamined (Byrne, 2006; Sleeter 1993). As several studies have indicated, an aspect of the power of whiteness as a cultural and symbolic formation is its invisibility and naming of "others" (e.g. Bonnett, 2000; Leonardo, 2002). This was highlighted in this study in the way that ethnic and racial "others" were occluded in the wider symbolic geography of Northwick and "othered" in Earlsdale. Bonnett argues that since the nineteenth century in Britain and North



America, there has been a “spatialised dualism” in play in regards to “race” and the city, in which the city has been cast as a dark, racialised other, and the rural as “white” and the “authentic national home” (2002: 362). We can also view class colonisation, particularly as it was manifested at Plumtree, as a case of what Reitman calls “whitewashing”. She explains: “The white workplace is created and maintained through a process of whitewashing in which everyday practices seek to deny racial politics, superimpose white culture and normalize that culture in place” (Reitman, 2006: 279). This dominant white perspective was transposed into the parental field and institutionalised and interpolated through the *class-work* of white middle-class mothers as volunteers and assistants. In contrast, whiteness was made visible, and destabilised, at Greenvale, through its hybrid workplace culture that inflected the symbolic and cultural forms of multicultural working-class life in the neighbourhood. Thus, in each school, emergent structures of race and class were articulated in contrasting ways.

The theme of race and class colonisation as they are played out in the contemporary urban scene is increasingly of interest to researchers. Since the fieldwork, an emerging literature and field of study at the intersections of urban geography/policy and critical sociology of education has taken shape. This has been reflected in a number of publications in special issues of journals, bringing together urban geographers and sociologists of education (e.g. *Urban Studies* 2007, 47[4], *Journal of Education Policy*, 2011, 23[2], *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 2011, 32[2]). A key focus is in understanding the relationship between educational spaces, community development and urban governance and politics (Lupton and Tunstall, 2008; Raco, 2009; Smith and Lupton, 2008); in particular, exploring the way “schools might contribute to local stores of social and political capital, or to more intangible senses of place and belonging among residents” (Hanson Thiem, 2008: 158-159). These authors are critical of the framework of gentrification, arguing that it acts as “a discursive umbrella to legitimate high profile projects” which seek to govern and manage the urban poor (Raco, 2009: 442). Similarly, Gulson (2006) suggests that there is a convergence between urban policy and middle-class interests. Writing in the US context about Chicago, Lipman argues that state-endorsed regeneration and gentrification are co-extensive and equally destructive to working-class African-American claims to the city.

An important theoretical locus is the work and critique of capitalism made by social theorist and geographer Harvey (e.g. 2005, 2009). Key here is the notion of neo-liberalism, a discourse and ideological formation which supports and underpins capitalistic urban development (Harvey, 2005). Lipman (2009: 5) describes it as:

the active intervention of the state on the side of capital, first to destroy existing institutional arrangements, and then to create a new infrastructure to facilitate capital accumulation through intensified exploitation of labour and privatization of social infrastructure and institutions.

Neo-liberalism is therefore about the rights to the city of some over others. For Harvey (2009) the “right to the city” is a collective right and capacity to shape urbanisation and thereby confront aspects of capitalistic development. The right to the city is a political ideal:

a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more. ... The cry comes from the aspiration of those superficially integrated into the system and sharing in its material benefits, but constrained in their opportunities for creative activity, oppressed in their social relationships. (Marcuse, 2009: 190-191)

Harvey argues that the “right to the city” as it is now constituted is too narrowly defined in the interests of business, political and economic elites to the detriment of the poor, migrants and other urban “outcasts” (see also Pedroni, 2011). According to researchers in this nascent field social relations within urban educational settings must be located more comprehensively within the logics of urbanisation and social relations of capitalism.

These themes clearly resonate with the concerns of this thesis. The high-profile market-led regeneration of the Carlton estate, as well as the wider urban policies implemented within Croxfield, were clearly an important determinant of the overall character of class relations in the two specific locales. The regeneration of the Carlton estate removed some of the most impoverished and recalcitrant families to make way for a new identity, which private investors were quick to capitalise on. As Lipman argues, “according to this racialized neoliberal logic, while public housing and public schools breed dysfunction and failure, private management, the market, and public-private partnerships foster entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, choice, and

discipline” (2011: 226). Much of the redevelopment of the estate had left its working-class inhabitants with few public infrastructure (e.g. youth clubs and community centres), with some of the new resources being monopolised by the incoming middle-class. Further, the proximity established by “mixed-communities” urban policy, appeared to have brought with it a hardening of racial and class boundaries and widening of social distance between the incoming middle-class and multi-ethnic working-classes. Yet, as I showed, Bev, the head of Greenvale, did not align herself or the school with this neo-liberal vision. Bev represented a different understanding of urban community development, and she was able to mobilise an alternative professional agenda for education and the city which placed working-class betterment at its centre, whereas, at Plumtree, “common-sense” amongst leadership aligned itself with the dominant interests and agenda of the middle-class. In addition, several of the assistants in this study were employed as a direct result of additional funding made available to schools through various area-based policy initiatives such as Excellence in the Cities (EiCs) which ran from 1999 to 2006 (DCSF, 2007). Assistants were a crucial aspect of these policy attempts to tackle disadvantage through mobilisation of local populations, to fill the gap created by divestment of the state. Thus assistants’ formation and experiences could also have been framed in relation to these urban policies. Situating and exploring assistants’ subjectivities and work in relation to these concerns would have brought out more clearly what is distinctively *urban* about these educational contexts and social changes. Seen from this perspective, studies such as the present one can be viewed as accounts of “neoliberalism in education [as it] is produced on the ground through the actions of teachers and parents” and assistants (Lipman, 2011: 218), and perhaps more significantly, though we would do well not to romanticise this point, how it can be and is resisted.

### **10.2.5. Implications for practice**

Whilst the contributions of this study are mainly theoretically and methodologically driven, it also has a number of practical implications. First, with regard to headship, this study adds weight to the consideration that the different class and cultural habitus of assistants add a layer of complexity to school management and leadership which needs to be acknowledged and developed further. Heads need to find ways to enhance TAs’

participation and usefully tap into their perspectives. TAs must be viewed as integral rather than peripheral members of staff. Thus I would recommend training and development for heads and other senior staff on managing assistants and other support staff. There is also a need for a renewed commitment to build up the capacity of heads to meet the challenges of leadership in increasingly gentrified urban schools. A new *critical* vision of urban headship urgently needs to be articulated by teacher educators. Heads can be helped to become more reflexive practitioners if they are made aware of the political, social and cultural contexts in which they will exercise their professional duties and vision. In particular, heads should understand the contested nature of schooling in changing class struggles and claims to the city. This is important if school leaders are to manage the participation and involvement of middle-class and working-class assistants, for the benefit of all. Equally, school leaders are rarely consulted and included in urban policy decision-making processes, yet as this study has demonstrated they have powerful knowledge and understanding of community development and the struggles of pupils and their families. The work of scholars in critical pedagogy and democratic education would be a useful place to begin to work through some of the pedagogical implications (e.g. Brent Edwards, 2010; Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Giroux, 2010; Leonardo, 2009; Malott, 2010; McLaren and Jaramillo, 2010).

Further, most teachers do not receive sufficient training on working with assistants, nor specifically how they can work in collaborative and equitable ways. Teachers need to reflect on the way that they organise their classrooms, and respond to the wider pressures of their work, and how this can contribute to the production of educational inequalities. Shifting the responsibility for pupils that they find difficult is neither in the interest of pupils nor assistants (Blatchford *et al.*, 2007). Assistants can and do contribute a great deal of knowledge, enthusiasm, skills, dedication to their roles but, as I showed in this study, they can be constrained by the poor institutional resourcing of their role, underlined by inequitable pay and conditions (UNISON, 2007) which remain a source of dissatisfaction. Fostering an inclusive school culture in which assistants and teachers are able to work collegially is vital and can only benefit pupils (Nias, 1998).

This study suggests that it is too simplistic to view assistants as a progressive force within the educational system without attending to the way class dynamics inflect their institutional lives and the unintended consequences of their class-work. If assistants are to realise the potential of their positions to make a difference and contribute to culturally-responsive pedagogies, their own cultural and social identities must be institutionally legitimised and recognised within urban schools. How schools go about such a task, as this study has shown, is complex and part of on-going struggles over education, its meaning and the possibilities of its equitable realisations.

### **10.3. *Limitations of the study and extending the research***

In this section, I consider the limitations of the study and the ways it could have been improved, and how its topics and concerns can be further developed.

As mentioned previously, the themes of gentrification and class colonisation emerged inductively from the fieldwork rather than prior to it. Fieldwork and the knowledge it produces is necessarily partial, and shaped both by the purposes and experiences of a researcher and his/her interactions in the field. Rock observes, “it is inevitable that one will proceed to writing with a consciousness that one does not quite know everything, that there was neglect” (2001: 36). If I were to conduct the fieldwork again, I may have chosen to spend my time differently: in somewhat different spaces, spoken to different people, covered some topics differently and pursued different lines of questioning. An earlier focus on gentrification would have led to an explicit emphasis on class dynamics in my observations, more comprehensive interviewing of parents and charting of TAs’ social networks. I would like to have interviewed more working-class parents at both schools, as clearly their experiences and perceptions would have enriched the comparative class analysis. Overall, the parental dimension could, and should, be developed in future work of this kind, particularly differences of race/ethnicity (e.g. black, Turkish-speaking etc.) amongst working and middle-class fractions. In addition, contrasts and differences between the institutional positions of male and female assistants could have been more thoroughly developed. I would have liked to explore gender positioning and identity in relation to workplace culture. However, the numbers of male assistants were very small and the class focus of this study meant that

perhaps this dimension of experience and identity was not explored as fully as it might have been.

Earlsdale and Northwick, as I have argued, were being gentrified by relatively similar fractions of the liberal white middle-classes. It would be interesting to undertake a similar study in other localities where other fractions of the middle-class dominate, both within London and elsewhere. This would enable a comparative examination of how class colonisation is re-configured in different ideological class contexts, and its impact on assistant roles and identities.

Class colonisation is an emergent temporal process, and this study has merely taken an extended snapshot in terms of events, processes and subjectivities at Plumtree and Greenvale. Perhaps the contrasts between the neighbourhoods and schools, so vividly captured here, might erode or deepen with time. Adding a longitudinal element would offer expanded opportunities to see if this is the case. It would be interesting to explore the continuing significance of leadership in negotiating middle-class mobilisation as the boundaries between school-neighbourhood are shaped by on-going socio-economic changes in wider social space. What schools such as Plumtree and Greenvale and their localities might be like in the future is a fascinating topic, which I hope this study will encourage more researchers to enquire.

An important area of development is the examination of individual TA-teacher relationships in shaping assistants' institutional experiences and work. Whilst I provided a broad outline of the TA-teacher dynamics in relation to the interaction order (in §7.1), this was necessarily at an abstracted level, and did not fully explore issues arising from the specificities and details of teachers and TAs' habitus and work roles. For example, various contrasts and comparisons could be made between particular assistant-teacher relationships in terms of class, race/ethnicity and gender which would illuminate further the complexity of educational work and institutional positionality. This leads us to perhaps the most obvious omission in this study. I have excluded the experiences of those who are the very focus of educational work, namely pupils. This was a difficult choice to make. Several decades of qualitative research has highlighted pupils' agency in the construction of institutional realities in schools (e.g. Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2000; Hammersley, 1999; Hammersley and Woods,

1984; Pollard and Filer, 1999). As active agents, it is likely that pupils' own habitus contributes to and mediates class colonisation processes. This is worth exploring. It cannot be assumed that the problematic and exclusionary institutional *work* context experienced by assistants and teachers is the same for pupils. A focus on pupil experiences could be productively compared and contrasted with those of assistants and teachers. There is scope also to develop interconnections with the growing number of studies which are mapping children and young people's classed and racialised experiences of place-based identities in various cities, with often a global dimension (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Dillabough and Kennelly, 2010; Hollingworth and Archer, 2010; Holt and Costello, 2011; Pickering, Kintrea and Bannister, 2011; Reay, 2007). With regard to pedagogy and education, this study has brought to light several problematic aspects of assistants' pupil focus. More work is needed to understand how pupils typified as "problematic" or "deviant" negotiate their educational identities with assistants, particularly in relation to the tendency of recruiting black working-class male TAs to work with black boys. Existing research on teachers can usefully contribute to unravelling the complex questions of gender, institutional positioning, race, culture and power amongst black assistants (e.g. Carrington, Tymms and Merrell, 2008; Odih, 2004; Owen, 2003; Solomon, 1997). More effort needs to be made to connect these working practices with the construction of black urban masculinities as *undesirable* within schools (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendick, 2010; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Youdell, 2003).

As I mentioned above, the emerging "spatial turn" towards critical urban theory (Taylor *et al.*, 2011) within sociology of education is opening up new and interesting lines of enquiry which are relevant in considering possible future research agendas. The emphasis on examining educational policy in relation to urban development is significant and suggestive. A weakness of this study was the contextualisation of urban policy. Earlsdale, and to a lesser extent Northwick, have been the target of various urban policies intended to address social disadvantage in which schools have played a key role. The work of social theorists/activists such as Harvey, Marcuse and Lipman offer promise and a potentially productive dialogue with the substantive themes and concerns of this thesis. This study can be complemented by further in-depth explorations of assistants' experiential narratives and working practices in different

national and institutional contexts, such as the work of Bourke in Australia (2008), Stewart (2009) in Scotland, the phenomenological research undertaken by Roffey-Barentsen (2011) and Dillow's (2010) auto-ethnographic study. There still remains a dearth of critical research on assistants work and identities outside most of the original literature cited earlier in the study, particularly in the UK, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Dunne, Goddard and Woolhouse, 2008; Hammersley-Fletcher, 2008; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2008). Whilst there has been more of a focus on assistants since the fieldwork, as researchers have looked into the consequences of *workforce remodelling* for the teaching workforce (Bach, 2007; Bach, Kessler and Heron, 2006; Gunter, 2007; Hutchings *et al.*, 2009) and the introduction of the HLTA role (Sandorek, 2009), changing government agendas mean TAs no longer hold the interest of policy makers; assistants appear to be receding into the background and resuming their invisibility once more. I hope this is a trend that can be turned around.

I have learnt much from my fieldwork, from the observed lives and recorded accounts of the TAs, teachers and heads who so generously (though sometimes reluctantly) gave of their time; more than can ever be contained within this thesis. As I conclude what has been a long research journey, I am reminded of one working-class assistant's comment from one of my earliest fieldwork encounters:

Why do you want to do that [research on TAs] for, I mean what's there to know? Cor, they don't half do odd courses ... What's there to write about?

(Ruth: FN8-03-04)

What is there to write about? I hope I have shown that Ruth's and other TAs' working lives provide a rich vein of lived material that can contribute not only to better understanding and practice within the direct field of urban schooling, but also offer valuable perspectives to cast light on many wider issues of class and social change in the contemporary urban scene.



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## Appendices

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### ***Appendix A: Lists of Terms***

This section contains lists of acronyms and abbreviations, plus a glossary of the key theoretical terms used in the study.

*Table 6 (appendices): Acronyms and abbreviations*

CA	Classroom Assistant
DCSF	Department of Children, Schools and Families
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DES	Department of Education
ESS	Education Support Staff
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
LM	Learning Mentor
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NLS	Literacy Strategy
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NNLS	National Numeracy and Literacy Strategy
NNS	National Numeracy Strategy
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
Paraeducator/paraprofessional/ Teachers' Aides	Terms in use for the teaching assistant role or equivalent in the United States of America and Australia
PPA	Planning, Preparation Assessment
ONS	Office of National Statistics
TA	Teaching Assistant
TDA	Teacher and Development Agency for Schools
STAC	Specialist Teaching Assistant Certificate

*Table 7 (appendices): Glossary of theoretical concepts*

Habitus	Represents the way past experiences in different structured social contexts (i.e. fields) become internalized and provide individuals/groups with a range of dispositions, cognitions, perspectives that tend to guide and inform their actions. It is the basis on which identity and selfhood is expressed and crafted. The habitus is shaped through the on-going struggle for capitals, value meaning, and position within fields of competition.
Field	A structured social space defined in relation to the types and forms of capital operative within it. It specifies the form social relations take and develop in the struggle for capital. These social relations describe the distribution of power/resources and the positions that individuals or groups occupy. Individuals may occupy dominant and dominated positions within fields. More powerful groups define the value and currency of capitals operative in a field. The habitus endows the field with sense and value.
Capitals	Any object (material, cultural, symbolic) which can function as a valued resource to advance or maintain an individual or group's position in the social space. That is to say, it is power. There are different broad types of capitals (economic, social, cultural) which have different forms (institutionalized, embodied, etc.).
Symbolic capital and violence	Symbolic capital is the legitimization that accompanies the use of other forms of capital. It is the capacity to represent (and thereby potentially conceal) the exercise of use of power, and its basis in unequal social relations, as natural and legitimate. This is wielded by those who occupy dominant positions within fields. Symbolic violence describes the "violence" done to those who occupy less powerful positions' understanding of the social world and their own position within it.
Interaction ritual	Describes an emotionally motivated intersubjective reality achieved through mutual coordinating and calibration of talk and bodily responses. Symbols that are the focus of the interaction become charged with emotional energy and internalised. When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. Rituals can vary in innumerable ways, in terms of their emotional intensity, cognitive focus, entrainment, formality, etc. Furthermore, interaction rituals establish a basic social bond between individuals, and moral commitment to a common social reality to which they are orientated.
Self/identity	The agency manifested within an interaction ritual that communicates and realizes an identity or situated self. In part it consists of an awareness of the role expectations and demands that are performed in an interaction ritual. It also expresses embodied emotional energy and an individual's embodied cultural capital and style.
Cultural style/expressive repertoires	The embodied cultural capital which provides the primary resource and repertoire that informs how individuals construct their identities within interaction rituals. It is shaped by the habitus and others' evaluation and response to the identities manifested within a situation, and each participants' interactional control over other resources such as the setting/scenery.
Power ritual	Interaction rituals where authority relations (on a spectrum of order-giving and order-taking) are the focus. Individuals' response and experiences to their positions along this spectrum within work contexts provide an important occupational structuring of the habitus. It is a key aspect of everyday experience of power.
Front and backstage regions	Social settings where individuals' behaviour and self-presentation are held to different standards and expectations due to the nature of the audience present. This therefore allows different performative possibilities for –presentations of self.
Class position	A class (or fraction) is a group which shares similar homologous positions in a hierarchical social space of struggle and competition for key types of capitals. They will tend to shared similar origins, trajectories, and experiences which are internalized in the habitus and guide the strategies and actions enacted by its members.
Structuration	The processes by which structures are generated and maintained as highlighted through the concepts of interaction ritual, cultural style, self, capitals, fields, habitus, etc.

## Appendix B: Informant Profiles

This section provides supplementary socio-demographic and background on the informants discussed in chapter 6, plus all other participants in the study. It also lists all interviews conducted.

Table 8 (appendices): Profile of middle-class TAs interviewed at Plumtree and Greenvale<sup>69</sup>

Name	Gender	Age	Role & length of service at school	Highest qualifications	Previous career/jobs	Marital status	Partner's employment	Household income	Housing status	Children have attended school (number currently attending)	Resident in the immediate neighbourhood (number of years)	Ethnicity
<b>Plumtree</b>												
Anthea	Female	41-45	TA: 2yrs	Higher diploma	Desktop publisher	M/LWP	Musician entrepreneur	Variable	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes (9)	White British
Chloe	Female	31-35	TA: 1yr	Masters	Editor	M/LWP	Public relations director	31-40K	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes (8)	White British
Ellie	Female	41-45	TA: 2yr	Degree	Researcher at international charity	M/LWP	Film special effects creator	51-60K	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes (16)	White British
Kirsten	Female	36-40	TA: 3yrs	High school matriculation	Office manager NHS	M/LWP	Not Known	41-50K	O/O Semi	Yes	Yes (16)	White Australian
Leah	Female	26-30	TA: 1yr	Degree	Temp (admin) in NHS	Single	N/A	11-20K <sup>70</sup>	LH in O/O Terrace	N/A	Yes – BB	Israeli-British
<b>Greenvale</b>												
Lillian	Female	41-45	TA: 1yr	Masters	Design consultant/Ceramist & LSA	M/LWP	Housing officer	31-40K	O/O Semi	Yes	Yes (12+)	White British

<sup>69</sup> The data summarised here is derived from a short structured socio-demographic questionnaire administered to informants (see appendix F) and supplemented in places by information gathered in the field.

<sup>70</sup> Personal income.

Michelle	Female	36-40	Learning Mentor: 4yrs	Degree	Editorial assistant	M/LWP	Photographic technician	21-30K	O/O Maisonette	Yes	Yes – BB	White British
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KEY: M/LWP=Married/Living with partner    •SP=Single Parent    •PT or FT=Part-time or Full-time    •O/O=Owner-Occupied  
 •LHP=living at home with parents    •BB=Born and bred

Table 9 (appendices): Profile of working-class TAs at Plumtree and Greenvale

Name	Gender	Age	Role & Length of Service at School	Highest Qualifications	Previous career/jobs	Marital Status	Partner's Employment	Household Income	Housing Status	Children have attended school (number currently attending)	Resident in the neighbourhood <sup>71</sup> (number of years)	Ethnicity
<b>Plumtree</b>												
Amanda	Female	41-45	TA: 5yrs	Foundation Degree	Motorcycle Courier/dressmaker/hair dresser	Lone Parent	N/A	11-20K	O/O Flat	Yes (0)	Yes	White British
Andre	Male	26-30	TA: 4yrs	NVQs/BTEC	Play worker /youth worker	M/LWP	Housing Officer	21-30K	Rented council flat	N/A	No	Black British
Esma	Female	36-40	LM: 2yrs	GCSEs/O-Levels	LSA/Machinist	M/LWP	Not Known	21-30K	O/O Terrace	Yes (0)	Yes – BB	Turkish Cypriot
Hettie	Female	46-50	TA: 3yrs	Diploma	Hairdresser	SP	N/A	11-20K	Rented private flat	No	Yes	Black British
Keisha	Female	21-25	TA: 3yrs	BTEC	Playworker	Single	N/A	<10K	O/O Terrace (LHP)	N/A	No	Black British
Lucia	Female	41-45	TA: 12yrs	Diploma	Sales Assistant in Off-Licence	SP	N/A	11-20K	O/O council flat	Yes (0)?	Yes – BB	White British
Lynne	Female	21-25	Nursery Officer:	Diploma	Admin temp/youth worker	Single	N/A	11-20K	Rented private flat	N/A	No	Mixed-Race
Nisha	Female	26-30	TA: <1yr	Diploma	TEFL Teacher	M/LWP	Student	<10K	Rented private semi	N/A	No	South African-Indian
Paul	Male	21-25	TA: 1yr	A-Levels	LSA, youth worker	M/LWP	Full-time mother	21-30K	Rented private maisonette	No	No	Mixed race
Ruth	Female	51-60	TA: 15yrs	Diploma	Hairdresser	M/LWP	Mental health care worker	11-20K	Rented council flat	No	Yes – BB	White British
Sue	Female	61+	TA: 5yrs	GCSEs/O-Levels	Machinist	M/LWP	Driver	21-30K	Rented council maisonette	No	Yes – BB	White British

<sup>71</sup> Lives either in the immediate neighbourhood or the wider Borough of Croxfield

Greenvale												
Agnes	Female	31-35	TA: 2yrs	GCSEs/NVQs	Hair Stylist	M/LWP	Fire place fitter	11-20K	Rented council flat	Yes (1)	Yes –BB	Black British
Bahar	Female	41-45	BTA: 4yrs	Diploma in Nursery Nursing	LSA	M/LWP	IT Manager	31-40K	O/O Semi	No	No	Turkish Cypriot
Faye	Female	36-40	TA: 3yrs	Non-UK Degree	Care assistant	Single	N/A	<10K	Rented council flat	N/A	No	Black Caribbean
Gail	Female	36-40	TA: 13yrs	No formal Qualifications	Doctor's receptionist	M/LWP	Handy-man	11-20K	Rented council maisonette	Yes (1)	Yes–BB	White British
Irene	Female	31-35	TA: <1yr	Child care qualification No formal qualifications	Unemployed	M/LWP	Plumber	<10K	Rented private semi	Yes (1)	Yes–BB	White British
Justin	Male	26-30	TA: 1Yr	HND	Youth worker/Carnival artist	Single	N/A	11-20K	Rented private flat	N/A	Yes–BB	Black British
Lauren	Female	31-35	TA: 4yrs	GCSEs/Diploma in nursery nursing.	Admin assistant	M/LWP	Communications Engineer	31-40K	O/O maisonette	No	Yes (6+)	Black British
Marlon	Male	31-35	LM: 3yrs	GCSEs	Youth worker	M/LWP	Hairdresser	21-30K	Rented council flat	No	Yes–BB	Black British
Phoebe	Female	41-45	TA: 5yrs	GCSEs/NVQs	Nursery Nurse/hospital receptionist	M/LWP	Labourer	11-20K	Rented council terrace	No	Yes–BB	Black British
Tanya	Female	31-35	TA: 3yrs	O Levels/Access course in interior design	Secretary	SP	N/A	11-20K	Rented council terrace	Yes (0)	Yes (10+)	Black British
Vicky	Female	46-50	TA: 23yrs	No formal qualifications	Cleaner, library assistant	M/LWP	Builder	11-20K	O/O council maisonette	Yes (0)	Yes–BB	White British
Yolanda	Female	41-45	TA: 5yrs	GCSEs & TA level 2	Unemployed/ Sales assistant	M/LWP	Painter & decorator	11-20K	Rented council flat	Yes (0)	Yes–BB	Black British



Table 10 (appendices): Profile of teachers at Greenvale

Name	Gender	Age	Role & Tenure <sup>72</sup>	Highest Qualifications	Previous career/jobs	Marital Status	Partner's Employment	House hold Income	Housing Status	Children have attended school	Resident in the immediate neighbourhood	Ethnicity
Adelaide	Female	36-40	Teacher: 5yrs	Degree	Admin/Play scheme leader	SP	N/A	41-50K	Rented council maisonette	N/A	Yes	Black Caribbean
Bev	Female	51-60	Head: 15yrs	Degree	Deputy head teacher	M/LWP	Aviation consultant	101K+	O/O Flat	N/A	Yes <sup>73</sup>	White British
Cecilia	Female	46-50	Teacher: 6yrs	Degree	Cook	M/LWP	Banker	41-50K	O/O Semi-detached	No	No	African
Claire	Female	36-40	Teacher: <1yr	Degree	Nursery manager	M/LWP	Community worker	21-30K	O/O Terrace	N/A	Yes	Black British
Dave	Male	46-50	Teacher: 13yrs	Teaching Diploma	Builder/ Secondary school teacher	M/LWP	Teacher	90-100K	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes	Irish
Erica	Female	41-45	Teacher: 15yrs	Degree	Sales assistant	M/LWP	Teacher	90-100K	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes	White British
Hazel	Female	51-60	Teacher: 27yrs	Degree	N/A	LWP	Social work manager	61-70K	O/O Terrace	No	Yes (Northwick)	White British
Matthew	Male	36-40	Teacher: 10yrs	Degree	Vehicle driver	Single	N/A	31-40K	O/O Terrace	No	No	White UK
Muriel	Female	—	Teacher: 4+yrs <sup>74</sup>	Degree	—	—	—	40K+	—	—	—	Black Caribbean
Owen	Male	31-35	Deputy: 7yrs	Degree	Insurance claims assessor	Single	N/A	51-60K	O/O Semi-detached	N/A	Yes	White British
Sarah	Female	26-30	Teacher: NQT	Degree	Publications assistant/shop assistant	Single	N/A	21-30K	Rented council terrace (LHP)	N/A	No	Irish

<sup>72</sup> All teachers interviewed were full-time, and tenure has been rounded up to the nearest year, except when tenure is less than a year.

<sup>73</sup> Lived in Croxfield for 25years but moved to adjacent borough during fieldwork period.

<sup>74</sup> Incomplete data from questionnaire but qualitative data suggests at least 4yrs.

Stuart	Male	41-45	Teacher: 10yrs	Degree	Youth worker	M/LWP	Teacher	61-70K	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes <sup>75</sup>	English/ Irish
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<sup>75</sup> Had lived Croxfield for 20yrs but moved to adjacent borough prior to fieldwork.

Table 11 (appendices): Profile of parents at Greenvale

Name	Gender	Age	Formal position in Parental Field	Highest Qualifications	Marital Status	Employment Status	Partner's Employment	Household Income	Housing Status (length of residency)	Number of Children at School	SEN	Ethnicity
Abigail	Female	41-45	Former Treasurer of PC	Degree	M/LWP	FT Social services manager	Builder, former stockbroker/Artist	31-40k	O/O Terrace (12yrs)	2	No	White British
Arabella	Female	36-40	Chair of PC	Masters	M/LWP	Main carer & Art critic	Director of communications	91-100K	O/O Semi detached (4yrs)	2	No	White British
Imogen	Female	36-40	Previous Chair of PC	Degree	M/LWP	PT Theatrical agent (one day a week)	Creative director in advertising company	61-70K	O/O Semi-detached (4yrs)	2	No	White British
Ozlem	Female	36-40	—	Degree	Single Parent	"Gainfully unemployed"	N/A	<10K	Rented council flat (5yrs)	1	No	Turkish Cypriot
Robert	Male	51-55	—	Degree	M/LWP	FT Builder, former stockbroker/Artist	Social Services Manager	31-40K	O/O Terrace (12yrs)	2	No	White British
Alev Çemile Çiçek Didem Dilhan Gamze	Female	Varied	Attendees of Turkish Parents Support Group	—	The majority were M/LWP	Varied: main carers on benefits or engaged in low pay work.	—	Generally low	Majority in council rented accommodation	Varied	—	Turkish-speaking Kurds

Table 12 (appendices): Profile of teachers at Plumtree

Name	Gender	Age	Role and tenure <sup>76</sup>	Highest qualifications	Previous career/jobs	Marital status	Partner's employment	House hold income	Housing Status	Children have attended school	Resident in the immediate neighbourhood	Ethnicity
Avril	Female	26-30	Teacher: 3yrs	Degree	In a bank	Single	N/A	21-30K	Rented private flat	N/A	Yes	White Australian
Caragh	Female	36-40	Teacher: 4yrs	Degree	Education support worker	SP	N/A	21-30K	Rented council flat	Yes	Yes	White British
Estella	Female	41-45	Teacher: 24yrs	Degree	N/A	Single	N/A	21-30K	O/O Terrace	No	No	Black British
Fiona	Female	31-35	Teacher: 4yrs	Degree	N/A	Single	N/A	31-40K	O/O Terrace	N/A	No	White British
Isaac	Male	51-60	Teacher: <1yr <sup>77</sup>	A-levels equivalent	Writer/Bookseller	Single	N/A	?	Flat	N/A	Yes	Jewish Canadian
Leanne	Female	41-45	Teacher: 5yrs	Degree	Television production assistant	M/LWP	Graphic designer	61-70K	O/O Terrace	Yes	Yes	White European
Niamh	Female	26-30	Teacher: 4yrs	Masters	Banking	Single	N/A	21-30K	O/O Flat	N/A	No	English/British
Peter	Male	46-50	Deputy: 5yrs	Masters	N/A	M/LWP	Solicitor	71-80K	O/O Flat	Yes	Yes	White UK
Rachel	Female	21-25	Teacher: NQT	Degree	Teaching assistant/TEFL teacher	Single	N/A	21-30K	Rented private flat	N/A	Yes	White British
Tom	Male	36-40	Head: 2yrs	Degree	N/A	M/LWP	?	51-60K	O/O Flat	N/A	Yes	UK White
Yvette	Female	46-50	Teacher: 22yrs	Degree	Pension consultant	Single	N/A	21-30K	O/O Terrace	N/A	No	West Indian

<sup>76</sup> All teachers interviewed were full-time, and tenure has been rounded up to the nearest year, except when tenure is less than a year.

<sup>77</sup> Previously regular supply teacher to the school for over 5yrs.

Table 13 (appendices): Profile of parents at Plumtree

Name	Gender	Age	Formal position in Parental Field	Highest Qualifications	Marital Status	Employment Status	Partner's Employment	Household Income	Housing Status (length of residency)	N° of Children at School	SEN	Ethnicity
Adam	Male	41-45	Chair of governors	Degree	M/LWP	FT Company director	Deputy director of a national museum	101K+	O/O Terrace	2	No	Jewish & Scots
Alice	Female	41-45	Member of PC	Masters	M/LWP	Main carer and PT Art teacher	Medical research scientist	31-40K	O/O Terrace (4yrs)	3	No	White
Amy	Female	41-45	Member of PC	Degree	M/LWP	Main Carer – former Journalist	FT Press photographer	51-60K	O/O Terrace (10yrs)	3	No	White British
Anna	Female	36-40	Member of PC	GCSE/Equivalent	M/LWP	Main carer Former music promoter/organiser	Newspaper Journalist	41-50K	O/O Terrace (6yrs)	2	Yes (st)	Black British
Cynthia	Female	41-45	Chair of PC	A-Level/Diploma	M/LWP	PT Personal Assistant	Writer	41-50K	O/O Terrace: (4yrs)	1	No	White British
Elisabeth	Female	46-50	—	Degree	SP	PT Voluntary sector project officer	N/A	11-20K	O/O Terrace: (10yrs)	1	No	White British
Emily	Female	46-50	Member of PC	Degree	M/LWP	FT Journalist	FT Journalist	41-50K	O/O Terrace: (16yrs)	1	No	White British
Gladys	Female	41-45	—	Degree	M/LWP	FT FE Lecturer	Self-employed builder	21-30K	O/O Semi-detached (7yrs)	2	Yes (st)	Black UK
Jane	Female	26-30	—	GCSE	SP	Self-employed singer/songwriter	N/A	<10K	Private rented maisonette (<1yr)	1	Yes (st)	White British
Jennifer	Female	36-40	—	GCSE/Equivalent	SP	Office administrator	N/A	21-30K	O/O Maisonette in council estate	1	No	Black British
Kelly	Female	41-45	Member of PC & Parent governor	A-levels	M/LWP	PT School-home liaison officer	F.E Lecturer	31-40K	O/O Terrace	1	No	English/ Irish/ Jewish
Rebecca	Female	36-40	—	Degree	SP	FT Business owner	N/A	11-20K	Private rented maisonette (5yrs)	1	Yes (st)	African-Caribbean
Shona	Female	46-50	—	Degree	SP	FT Teacher	N/A	41-50K	O/O Terrace (23yrs)	1	Yes (st)	White British

Susan	Female	41-45	—	Degree	M/LWP	PT Solicitor and Main carer	FT Solicitor	71-80K	O/O Semi-detached (7yrs)	2	None	Irish
Ursula	Female	41-45	Co-Chair of PC	Degree	M/LWP	PT Solicitor	Solicitor	91-100K	O/O Terrace (12yrs)	3	No	White English/Scottish

*Table 14 (appendices): Informant data from focus group of TAs in Croxfield*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Length of service</b>	<b>Full-time/Part-time</b>	<b>Highest Qualification</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Nelly	36-40	TA	4yrs	PT	GCSE/O-Levels	School X	Irish
Maria	36-40	TA	4yrs	PT	GCSEs/O-Levels	School X	Irish
Anthea	See table 9 for their details.						
Kirsten	See table 9 for their details.						
Ellie	See table 9 for their details.						
Denise	41-45	TA/LSA	7yrs	FT	A-Levels/Equivalent	School Y	English
Mariam	36-40	TA	1yrs	PT	Degree	School Z	Jewish British

Table 15 (appendices): Complete list of informants interviewed for the study

Pseudonym	Date of 1 <sup>st</sup> Interview	Date of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Interview	Interview setting	School
<b>Teachers</b>				
Bev (Head)	27-04-2005		School	Greenvale
Owen (Deputy)	25-05-2005		School	Greenvale
Adelaide	22-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Cecilia	07-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Claire	14-04-2005		School	Greenvale
Dave	11-02-2005		School	Greenvale
Erica	19-05-2005		School	Greenvale
Hazel	08-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Matthew	07-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Muriel	16-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Sarah	16-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Stuart	28-04-2005		School	Greenvale
<b>Teaching Assistants</b>				
Agnes	09-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Bahar	28-02-2005	21-07-2005	School	Greenvale
Faye	08-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Gail	01-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Irene	17-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Justin	17-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Lauren	04-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Lillian	21-02-2005		School	Greenvale
Marlon	16-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Michelle	17-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Phoebe	01-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Tanya	18-03-2005		School	Greenvale
Vicky	18-04-2005		School	Greenvale
Yolanda	18-03-2005		School	Greenvale
<b>Parents</b>				
Abigail	08-06-2005		Home	Greenvale
Arabella	19-05-2005		School	Greenvale
Imogen	26-05-2005		School	Greenvale
Ozlem	10-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Robert	08-06-2005		Home	Greenvale
Alev	08-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Cemile	08-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Çiçek	08-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Didem	08-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Dilhan	08-06-2005		School	Greenvale
Gamze	08-06-2005		School	Greenvale
<b>Teachers</b>				
Tom (Head)	21-02-2005		School	Plumtree
Peter (Deputy)	21-02-2005		School	Plumtree
Avril	09-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Caragh	23-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Estella	30-06-2004	28-06-2005 <sup>78</sup>	School	Plumtree
Fiona	27-01-2005		School	Plumtree
Isaac	18-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Leanne	20-10-2004		School	Plumtree
Niamh	19-01-2005		School	Plumtree
Rachel	17-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Yvette	23-06-2004		School	Plumtree
<b>Teaching Assistants</b>				
Amanda	13-10-2004		School	Plumtree
Andre	16-06-2004	22-06-2005	School	Plumtree
Anthea	12-04-2004		School	Plumtree
Chloe	27-01-2005		School	Plumtree
Ellie	20-10-2004	22-06-2005	School	Plumtree
Esmá	15-10-2004		School	Plumtree
Hettie	20-09-2004		School	Plumtree
Keisha	12-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Kirsten	08-10-2004		School	Plumtree
Leah	12-11-2004		School	Plumtree

<sup>78</sup> Not recorded



Lucia	19-05-2004	27-06-2005	School	Plumtree
Lynne	18-11-2005		School	Plumtree
Nisha	17-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Paul	16-06-2004		School	Plumtree
Ruth	12-04-2004		School	Plumtree
Sue	19-01-2005		School	Plumtree
<b>Parents</b>				
Adam	03-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Alice	27-1-2005		School	Plumtree
Amy	09-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Anna <sup>79</sup>	27-05-2005		School	Plumtree
Cynthia	04-03-2005		Home	Plumtree
Elisabeth	09-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Emily	08-11-2004		Home	Plumtree
Gladys	31-05-2005		Workplace	Plumtree
Jane	12-11-2004		Home	Plumtree
Jennifer	09-06-2005		Home	Plumtree
Kelly	11-07-2005		Home	Plumtree
Rebecca	03-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Shona	03-11-2004		School	Plumtree
Susan	01-12-2004		Home	Plumtree
Ursula	04-03-2005		Home	Plumtree
<b>Miscellaneous</b>				
Sophie Bell (Head of Inclusion at Croxfield local authority)	11-11-2004			
Cornell (Acting head of ethnic minority achievement in Croxfield local authority)	28-07-2004			
Umut (Kurdish community worker)	27-04-2005			

<sup>79</sup> Not recorded.

## Appendix C: Statistical Information

This section contains supplementary statistical information used in the analysis of the neighbourhoods and schools.

Table 16 (appendices): Socio-demographic statistics: Northwick, Earlsdale and Croxfield

	Northwick (%)	Earlsdale (%)	Croxfield (%)
<b>Simplified Ethnicity as Given on Census of 2001</b>			
White (British & Irish)	55.5	47.4	47.1
Other	12.6	11.1	12.3
Mixed	4.1	5	4.2
Asian or Asian British (Bengali, Indian, Pakistani, Other)	7.2	5.5	8.6
Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, Other)	18.7	27.2	24.7
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	2	3.8	3.2
<b>Household Composition, Type and Tenure</b>			
Lone parent households with dependent children	8.3	10.7	10
Owner occupied	45.7	28.8	32.1
Rented from Council	25.5	38.4	30.7
Rented from Housing Association or Registered Social Landlord	12.7	21	20.1
Private rented or lived rent free	16.1	11.8	17.2
Percentage increase in house prices 1995-2005 <sup>80</sup>	297	323	278
Average House Price (Terrace House) in 2005 ( £Thousands)	£350	£331	£321
<b>Socio-economic class using (NS-SEC)<sup>81</sup> and Educational Qualifications</b>			
Economic Activity	41.2	31.8	51
Managerial and Professional Occupations	41.3	27.1	29.8
Intermediate Occupations	18.1	13.1	13.3
Routine and Manual Occupations	12.9	21.9	20.2
Had no qualifications	21.5	31.8	29
Qualified to a basic level (GCSE passes etc.)	9.8	10.3	10.5
Qualified to and inclusive of GCSE Level (5A-Cs)	11.5	13.7	13.8
Qualified to degree level or higher	45.8	30.4	32.9
Employed <sup>82</sup>	61.2	48.4	51.4
Unemployed	6.4	7.7	6.9
<b>Youth Crime</b>			
Young people were over represented as both perpetrators and victims of crime. In 2004 young people (those aged 10-17yrs) were perceived to have committed almost half (49.5 per cent) of all street crime offences. In the period 2001-2004 young people were responsible for 28 per cent of <i>all</i> crime in the borough. If the definition of young is extended to include those up to the age of 25, this rises to 66 per cent.			
Motor vehicle crime (theft from and of cars) was the highest volume crime in the borough and rates of burglary were also exceptionally high. In responses to the council's consultation, residents ranked violent crime, burglary, property crime, anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse, as significant concerns. Gun and knife crime was also very high.			
The high rates of criminal activity were reflected in residents' fear of crime. Croxfield residents were more fearful than most. In a borough survey in 2003, residents were asked how safe they felt walking alone in their area after dark, 47 per cent of respondents in Croxfield said they did not feel safe, in contrast, to 32 per cent nationally. As well as fears of victimisation, residents were equally concerned about the general level of "anti-social" behaviour and incivilities that they perceived around them. Drug dealing, rubbish and littering in public spaces and vandalism were rated as significant problems by residents.			

(Sources: CBC, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b; Office for National Statistics, 2005b; Proviser.com, 2006)

<sup>80</sup> Unadjusted for inflation.

<sup>81</sup> For an explanation and discussion of National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification see the National Office of Statistics website (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/classifications/current/ns-sec/cats-and-classes/ns-sec-classes-and-collapses/index.html>)

<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that the proportion of those in employment is generally smaller than all those economically active because the latter includes students.

## **Appendix D: ACORN Typologies**

This section provides illustrative examples of the ACORN typologies used in the characterisation of Earlsdale and Northwick in chapter 5. The typologies included are indicative and not exhaustive of the range of households and residents within those neighbourhoods. Each typology was generated from a category which is given a number (1-5), and has a series of lettered groups, which are then broken down into numbered types. The category and group are merely summary descriptions whilst the type level provides more detailed demographic and comparative information. All of the following information was retrieved from the ACORN user handbook (2006).

### **Hard-pressed (category)→Inner-city diversity (group)→ multi-ethnic estates (type)**

#### **Category: hard-pressed**

- This category contains the poorest areas of the UK. Unemployment is well above the national average. Levels of qualifications are low and those in work are likely to be employed in unskilled occupations. Household incomes are low and there are high levels of long-term illness in some areas. Housing is a mix of low-rise estates, with terraced or semi-detached houses, and purpose built flats, including high-rise blocks. Properties tend to be small and there is much overcrowding. Over 50% of the housing is rented from the local council or a housing association. There are a large number of single adult households, including many single pensioners and lone parents. In some neighbourhoods, there are high numbers of black and Asian residents. These people are experiencing the most difficult social and economic conditions in the whole country, and appear to have limited opportunity to improve their circumstances.

#### **Group: Inner-city diversity**

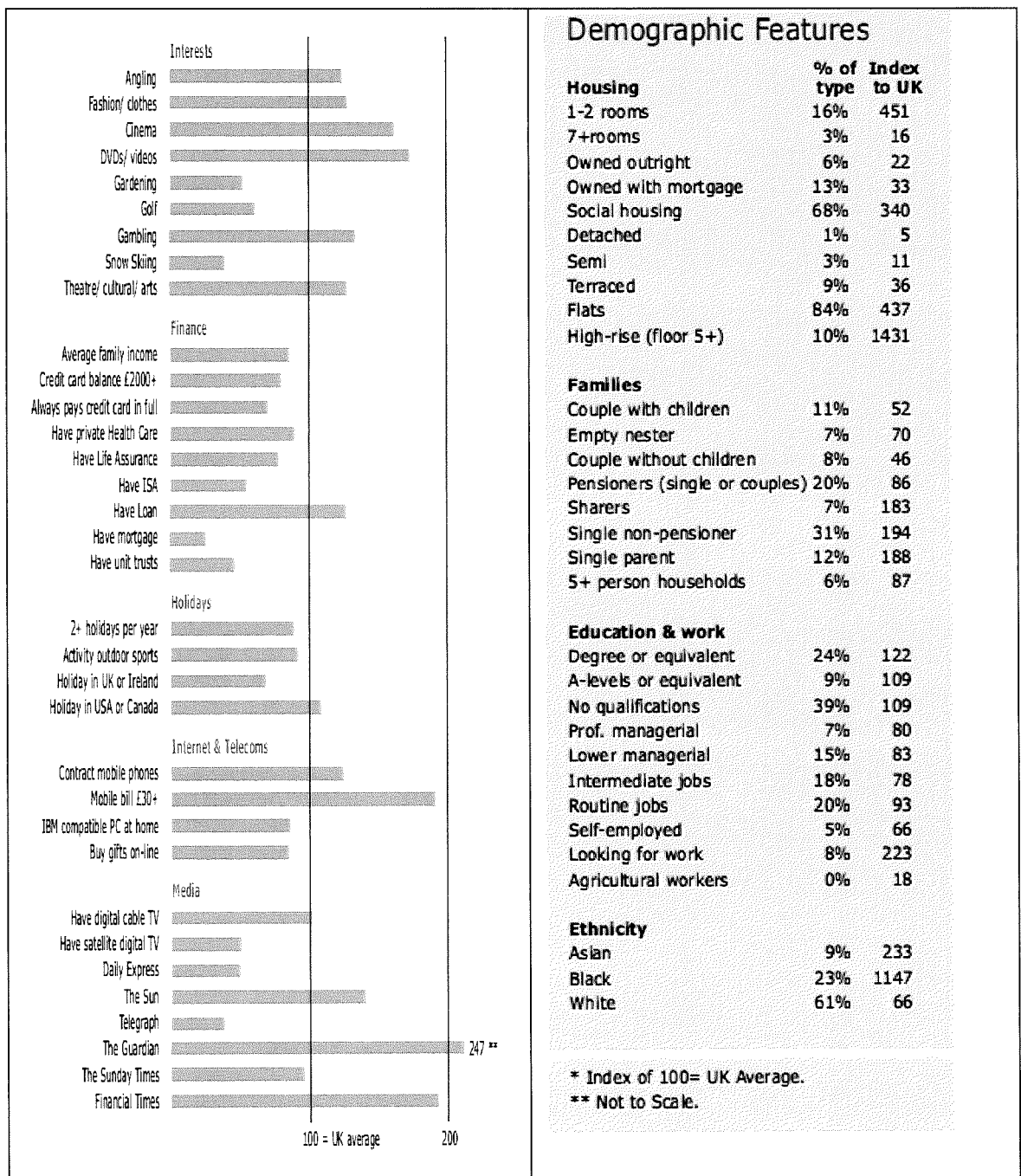
- These are densely populated urban areas with a young multi-ethnic population, primarily in and around London. 25% of the population is black and 14% is Asian. Households are typically young singles and young families, often single parent. They live in small flats in purpose built blocks, normally rented from the council or housing association. Unemployment levels are almost double the national average, and the working population is employed in routine, manual occupations. There is also a significant student population. Household incomes are very low with many earning less than £10,000 per annum. There is little money left for discretionary spending,

particularly for those with young families. Car ownership is very low and everyone is dependent on public transport. Like other young people they are interested in music, football and fashion. For many their religion is also very important. They are interested in current affairs, and whilst The Sun and Daily Mirror are popular, significant numbers read The Guardian and The Independent. These young multi-ethnic communities maintain a sense of vibrancy despite obvious hardship.

**Type: Multi-ethnic estates**

- These are some of the most densely populated urban areas in the country, and are characterised by a young, multi-ethnic population living in purpose built blocks of flats, some of which are high-rise. Over 20% of the population are Afro-Caribbean. They rent their small, one and two bedroom flats from the council and housing associations, and there is a high degree of overcrowding. Almost 60% of households are single people, including some single pensioners. There are average levels of children, but more than half of them live in single parent households. Unemployment levels are high and a significant proportion have been looking for work for some time. Employment tends to be in low skilled occupations and incomes are low. Students form 10% of the population in these areas. Like most young people they are interested in music, fashion and arts such as community theatre. Like all urban types, newspapers are popular. Readership is diverse and includes the Daily Mirror, Daily Sport, The Guardian and Independent. This type is mostly found in Inner London, in areas such as Southwark, Hackney, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets. There are also similar areas in central Glasgow.

**Figure B: Hard-pressed → Inner-city diversity → multi-ethnic estates**



## **Urban prosperity → Educated urbanites → Prosperous young professionals**

### **Category: Urban prosperity**

- These are well educated and mostly prosperous people living in our major towns and cities. They include both older wealthy people living in the most exclusive parts of London and other cities, and highly educated younger professionals moving up the corporate ladder. This category also includes some well-educated but less affluent individuals, such as students and graduates in their first jobs. The wealthier people tend to be in senior managerial or professional careers, and often live in large terraced or detached houses with four or more bedrooms. Some of the younger professionals may be buying or renting flats. The less affluent will be privately renting. These people have a cosmopolitan outlook and enjoy their urban lifestyle. They like to eat out in restaurants, go to the theatre and cinema and make the most of the culture and nightlife of the big city.

### **Group: Educated urbanites**

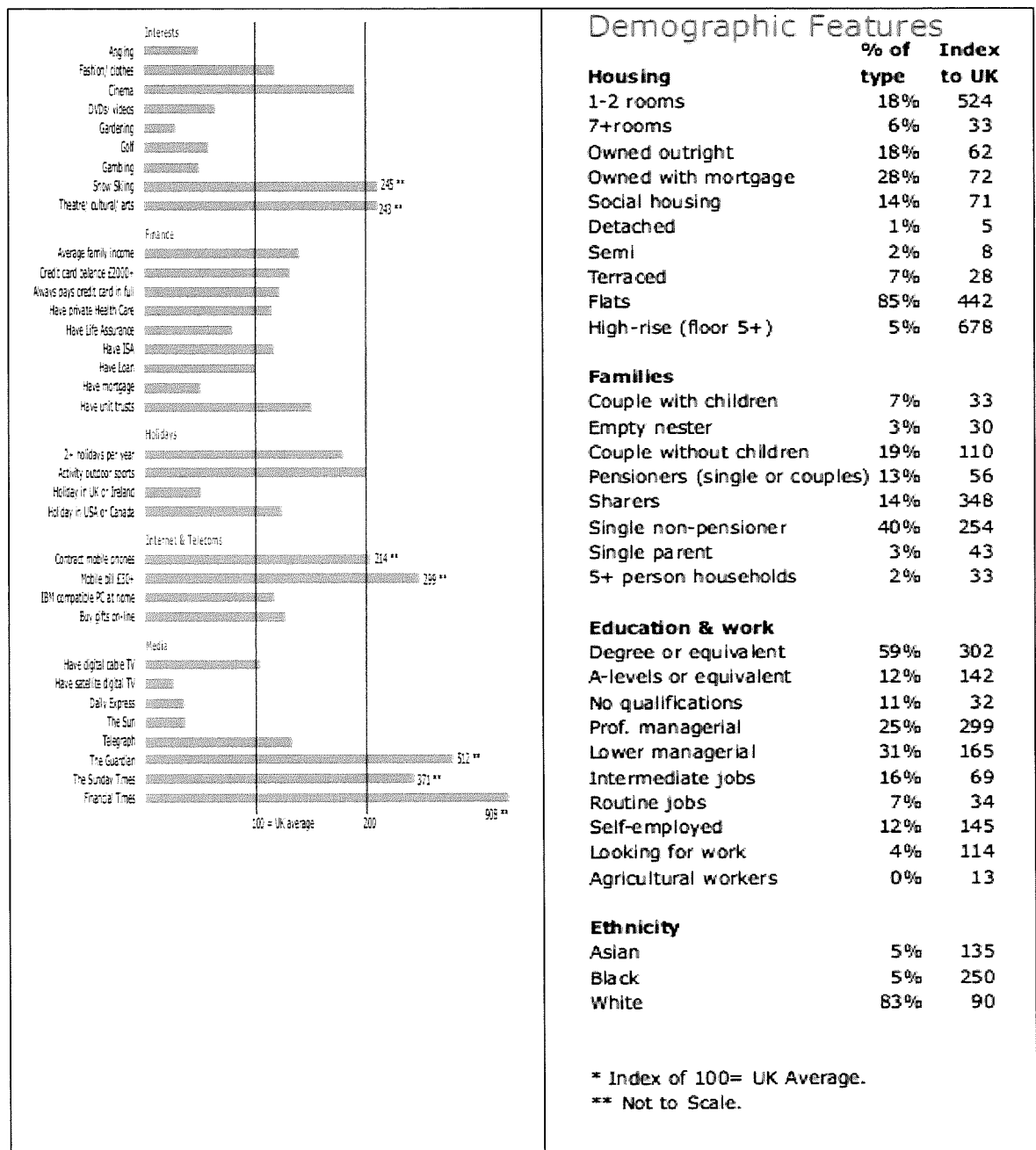
- These young people are highly qualified. The majority live in flats in our major cities. Most are in professional and managerial roles and many are working hard to further their careers. They have high incomes, and those that have been working for some time will be buying their flats and making other financial investments. The others are renting and have high disposable incomes. The one significant purchase they may make is an expensive car. However, many prefer to use public transport, particularly for travelling to work. Educated Urbanites take full advantage of living in the city and go out regularly. They enjoy restaurants and bars and are interested in the theatre and the arts. They are well informed about current affairs and are keen readers of The Guardian, Financial Times and Independent. This group will spend significant amounts on travel and take frequent holidays. They are very likely to go on long haul trips and will either ski or seek the sun in the winter. These young people have the world at their feet and plenty of money to enjoy it.

### **Type: Prosperous young professionals**

- These young people live in urban areas in purpose built and converted flats. This group has the highest levels of people aged 25-29. They are very highly qualified, and are making their way up the career ladder in the professions and managerial roles. They

earn high salaries. 40% of people live alone. There are also high numbers sharing larger properties. They are typically renting rather than buying, which reflects the more transient nature of these communities. They are hardworking and as a result make optimum use of their leisure time. They are twice as likely to use services such as ordering their groceries online for home delivery, and the Internet for shopping. These people are keen readers and have wide interests which include art, music, the theatre and cinema. They also eat out regularly in restaurants and pubs. They really like to travel abroad and will take the full range of holidays including winter sun and snow, weekend breaks and long haul trips. Given their high incomes, they do invest some of their money in a broad range of investments. They are keen users of credit cards for their purchases, with high monthly spend and correspondingly high credit limits. This type more closely follows current affairs than any other. Like other urban groups, they will buy a daily paper to read on the way to work and will choose from the Financial Times, The Guardian and Independent. On Sundays they choose the Observer and The Sunday Times. This type is found primarily in Inner London in Westminster, Camden, Islington, Haringey and Hackney as well as in Brighton, Bristol, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**Figure C: Urban prosperity → Educated urbanites → Prosperous young professionals**





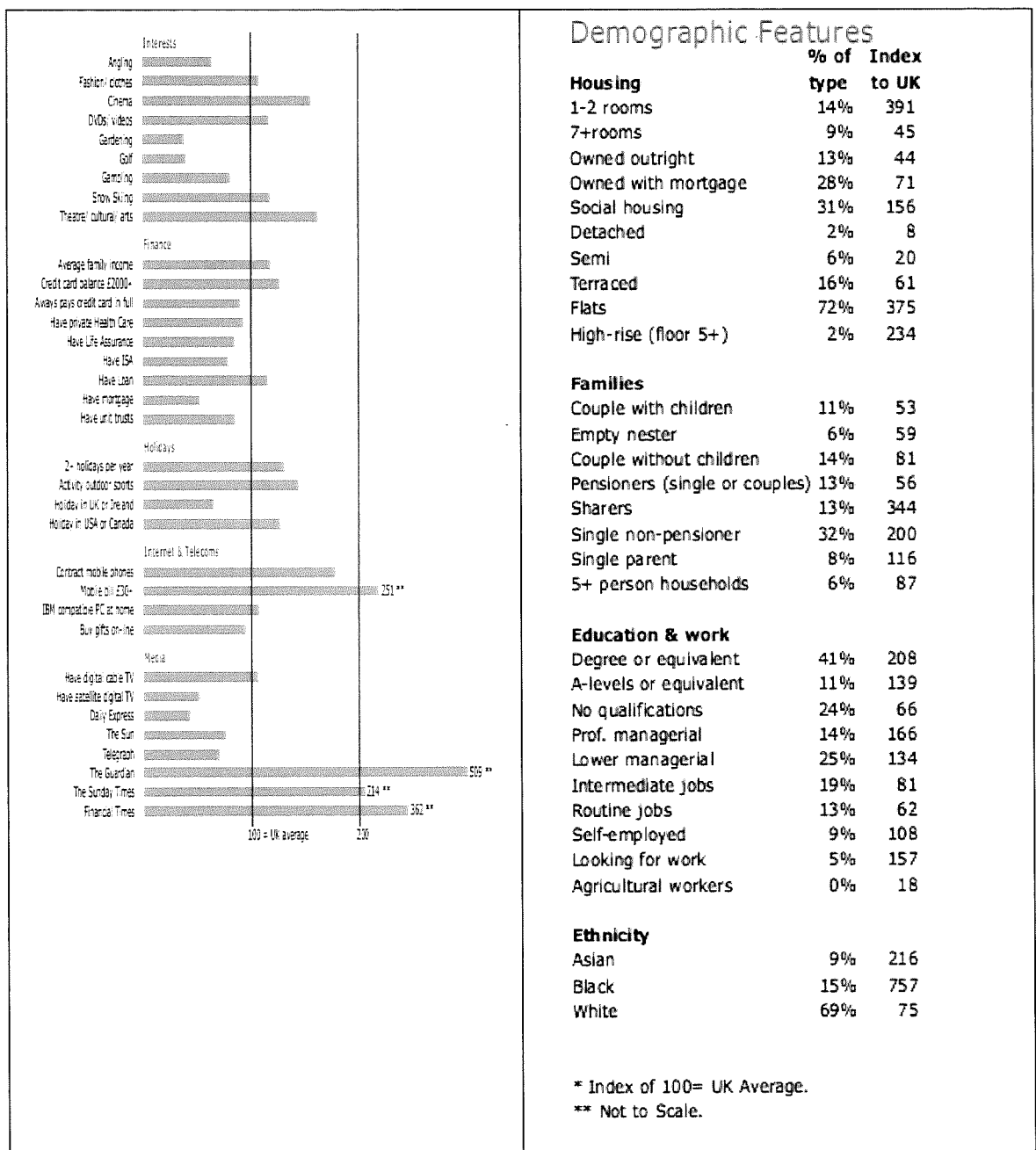
## **Urban prosperity → Educated urbanites → Multi-ethnic young, converted flats**

Explanations of the category and group can be found in the previous typology.

### **Type: Multi-ethnic young, converted flats**

- These young multi-ethnic communities are primarily found in London, with many living in houses which have been converted into flats. Most people are in their twenties and thirties and there are only a few, very young children. The population is diverse. On the whole they are well qualified. Many are in professional and managerial jobs, with good incomes. Others have lower level qualifications and are likely to be office and clerical staff. There are also a significant number of students. The majority of people are renting their homes privately. However, there is also a high proportion living in Housing Association property. Public transport is by far the most popular method of travelling to work or study. Residents are also happy to walk and only a minority see the need for a car. At this stage in their lives this type are not really thinking about investing their money. They will spend their spare money on travel, and will take long haul trips as well as European holidays. They like exercise and sport, as well as more contemplative pursuits such as the theatre, the arts and self-improvement classes. They are also very interested in current affairs and read The Guardian and The Independent as they commute to work. This type is almost exclusively a London phenomenon, with high concentrations in most inner and outer London boroughs.

**Figure D: Urban prosperity → Educated urbanites → Multi-ethnic young, converted flats**



## **Urban prosperity → Aspiring Singles → Singles and Sharers, Multi-ethnic areas**

The category descriptor can be found in the first typology. Here, the group and type descriptions are given.

### **Group: Aspiring Singles**

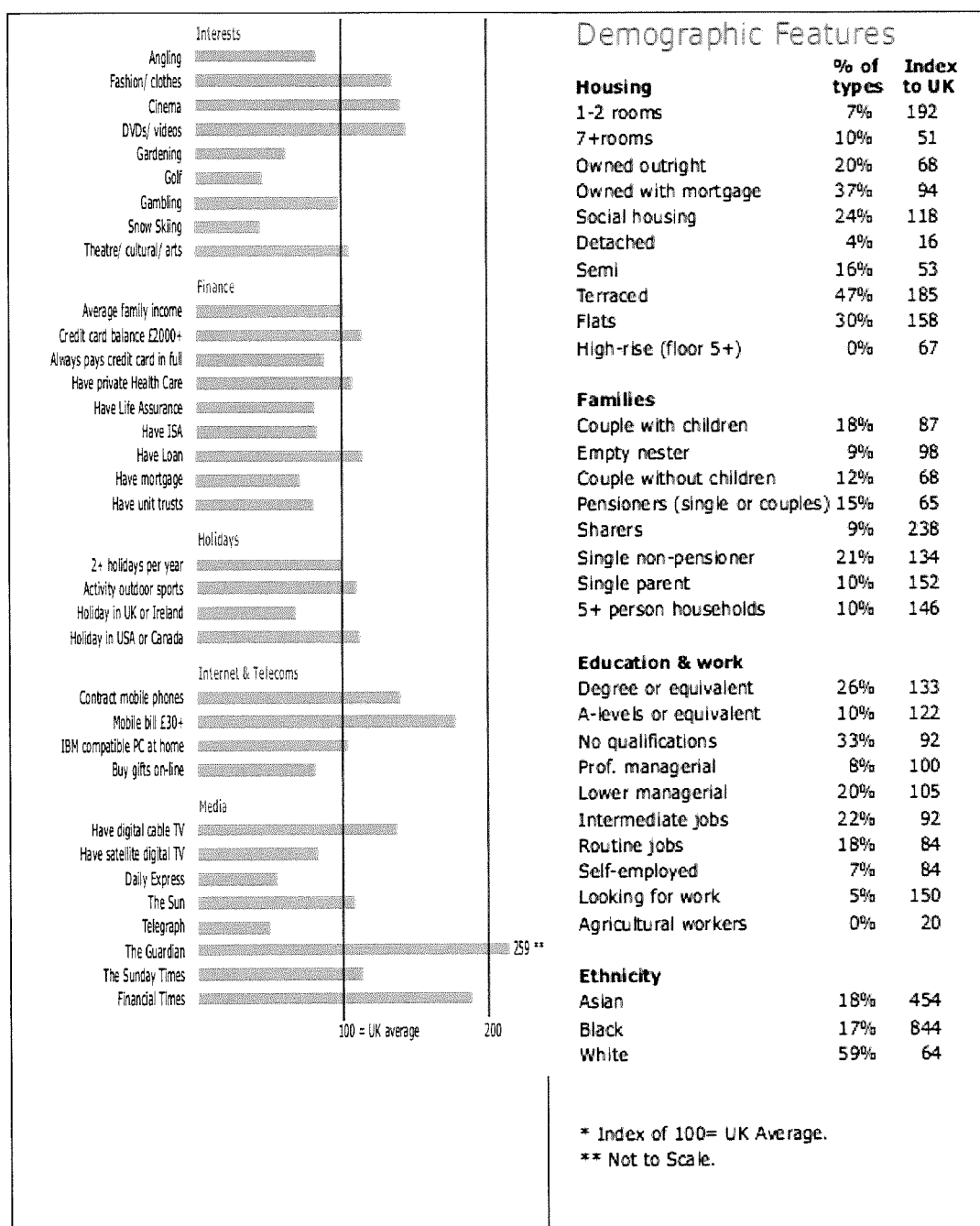
- Aspiring Singles are young and live in urban or suburban locations, frequently around London. There are large numbers of both students and well qualified young people who have recently finished their studies and started working. Many live in rented flats, both purpose built and converted. The flats tend to be small, typically one or two bedrooms, and be located in basements or above shops. While many single people live alone, there are also people sharing larger properties such as terraced houses. These are quite mobile populations with a high turnover of residents. People lead urban lifestyles. They are active, participating in sports and going to the gym. Like most young people, they enjoy going out with friends to pubs and clubs in the evenings, or to coffee shops during the day. Cars are relatively rare so transport is by bus, train, tube, or walking. They are highly confident with new technology and are likely to be regular users of the Internet for a wide range of purposes. Readership of liberal broadsheet newspapers such as The Guardian, Independent and Observer is high. Many of these active young people are likely to develop well-paid careers in the future.

### **Type: Singles and sharers, multi-ethnic areas**

- These are metropolitan white-collar populations with high concentrations of ethnic minorities. People are generally younger, typically under 40. There are some single parents, but most households comprise single people renting and sharing flats or terraced houses. The accommodation is small, often only one or two bedrooms. Around 35% of the population is black or Asian. Both minorities occur in broadly equal proportion across this type. The level of education is above average and jobs tend to be managerial or clerical. Levels of students, people working in the Public Sector and unemployment are all somewhat above the national average. These people do not need cars given their urban lifestyles. Instead, they will get about by walking and using public transport. They tend to go to coffee shops, and lunch in pubs or restaurants on a regular basis. They may also spend time in an art gallery or going to the theatre. Relatively high numbers have cable TV and DVD players. Reading, and sometimes religious activity also play a part in their leisure activities. They have some interest in current affairs and might be readers of The Guardian, The Observer or The

Independent. Increasingly they will use new technology such as telephone, PC and mobile phone for banking purposes. Many would like to upgrade to gold and platinum credit cards. More realistically, others are planning to pay off their debt. These types are mainly found in Inner London and Outer Metropolitan areas such as Croydon, Harrow, Southall and Ilford.

**Figure E: Urban prosperity → Aspiring Singles → Singles and Sharers, Multi-ethnic areas**



## **Appendix E: Fieldwork Interview Schedules**

This section documents the schedules used during formal interviews for TAs, teachers, parents and others.

### **TA Interview Schedule**

*Interview Aims: to ascertain TAs' perspectives on the nature and experience of their roles and relationships within the school. How the role is understood and enacted and the changes they have experienced in the role, their career trajectories and the wider neighbourhood.*

Introduction: information about research, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

#### **❖ Perceptions and experiences of role**

How has your day been?

How would you describe your role/job?

What do you enjoy about your job?

What do you not enjoy about your job?

What do you find most challenging about the job?

What are the funnier aspects of the job?

What are the best lessons for you?

Probe: examples, why

What are the most boring lessons for you?

Probe: examples, why.

#### **❖ Working relationships**

How do you work with teachers?

Probe: type of support given, planning, meetings etc.

Describe your relationship with other members of the teaching staff?

How do you think the teaching staff see/perceive your role?

How would you describe your relationship with the class teacher/s?

Do you have much contact with teaching staff?

How would you describe the way X [teacher] teaches?

How confident do you feel about the work that the children do?

Do you use the staffroom much?

Probe: how comfortable do they feel in there?

### ❖ Relationships with pupils

How would you describe your relationship with the child/ren you work with?

Probe: in general as well as the worked with

How does this differ with the relationship the child/ren have with teachers?

How do you think the children see/perceive your role?

Probe: Helper/ assistant teacher ...

What do the children call you?

Probe: first name, authority, etc.

Do you feel that there is an issue with discipline in this school?

Probe: leadership.

### ❖ Changes in the role

How has your role changed since you started?

Probe: kind of support given

What do you feel are the most important qualities someone has to have to do this job?

What do you think of the government's proposed plan to increase the role and responsibilities of TAs?

How do you feel about taking on a whole class?

### ❖ School & Community:

What is the local area around the school like?

Did you have links with the school before you worked here?

Probe: children, friends, etc.

What sorts of backgrounds do the children who come to this school have?

Do you feel that the TAs reflect the ethnic diversity of the school?

Probe: does it matter, why, in what ways.

Do you know any of the children outside school?

Probe: socialise with their parents etc.

How would you describe your relationship with parents?

Probe: channels of communication support.

Do you feel that parents have a voice in the school?

What kind of reputation does the school have?

Probe: why do parents choose this school, the local 'market'?

Do you feel that there is a sense of community at the school?

### ❖ **Parent TAs**

What do you feel are the advantages in working in the same school as your child?

Probe: timetable, flexibility, pick up bullying etc., more information on their development, control.

What do you feel are the disadvantages?

Probe: discipline issues, effect on child's behaviour.

### ❖ **Educational experiences**

What were your experiences of school?

Probe: enjoyment, social aspects, inspirational teachers.

What kind of child were you at school?

What are the differences between the schooling you experienced and the schooling of children today?

Do you feel that the school prepares children for the wider world?

### ❖ **Career trajectories**

How did you get your job?

Why do you think you were chosen for the job?

What do you think are the key skills someone doing your job has to have?

What influenced your decision to take up this job?

Probe: children at school, returning to work.

Have your previous qualifications/job helped in any way to do your current job?

In what ways do you feel that the school supports the work of TAs?

Probe: training, inset days, courses, how could this be improved.

What do you think about the pay structure for TAs at the moment?  
Probe: in what ways can the career path of TAs be improved?

Have you considered teaching?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Is there anything else that you feel has not been mentioned?

❖ **Extra questions (fill in as appropriate pre-interview)**

### **Thanks/Debrief**

Are there any questions you would like to ask me about the research and/or the interview?

The data may be transcribed but all efforts will be made to anonymise your details, so that you are not identifiable in any written report/thesis. Everything we have discussed is of course confidential.

Thank you again for your time and participation.



## Teacher Interview Schedule

*Interview aims: to ascertain the perspectives of teachers on the TA role, it's impact on their working lives, their sense of professional identity, understandings of children's backgrounds, home-school relationships and their own educational experiences.*

Introduction: information about research, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

### ❖ TA Working relationships

How has your day been?

What have been the most significant changes in teaching in your career?

Probe: national curriculum, CPD, support staff, National numeracy and literacy strategies.

How has the role of TA changed since you have been teaching?

How do you feel that TA contribute to the education of children?

Probe: in particular and in general across the school.

Why do you think that teachers' have an increased need for TAs ?

How do you as teacher support TAs to perform their roles within the classroom?

Probe: what is the TA role in your class.

How would you describe the relationship between teachers and TAs?

What do you most enjoy about having other adults in the classroom?

What do you most dislike about having other adults in the classroom?

Do you use the staffroom much?

Probe: how comfortable do they feel in there, its functions?

### ❖ Professionalism & Identity

What does professionalism mean to you as a teacher?

Probe: commitment, colleagues, understanding the children,

What are the challenges facing teachers today?

What would make your teaching life easier/pleasurable?

What the barriers to learning do you feel that some of the children in your class encounter?

What do you think are the pressures on teachers' time?

Do you think there is a clear sense of leadership in this school?

Probe: from whom.

What made you go into teaching?

Probe: biographical trajectory and previous experiences.

How would describe your relationship with the children you teach?

### ❖ **Community & Children's background**

What is the local area around the school like?

Did you have links with the school before you worked here?

What sorts of backgrounds do the children who come to this school have?

Do you feel home background is important in understanding children in your class?

What kind of reputation does the school have?

How do you feel about working in this school?

Why do parents want to send their children to this school?

Probe: the local school 'market'.

Do you feel that there is a sense of community at the school?

### ❖ **Home-School relationships**

How would you describe the relationship between yourself and parents?

Is there much parental involvement in this school?

Probe: what and how parents get involved.

Do you feel that there is trust between yourself and parents/pupils/TAs/colleagues?

Probe: what does trust mean to you.

### ❖ **Educational experiences**

What were your experiences of school?

Probe: enjoyment, social aspects, inspirational teachers.

What kind of child were you at school?

What are the differences between the schooling you experienced and the schooling of children today?

Do you feel that the school prepares children for the wider world?

### ❖ **For parent teachers**

What do you feel are the advantages in working in the same school as your child?

Probe: timetable, flexibility, picking up bullying etc, more information on their development, control.

What do you feel are the disadvantages?

Probe: discipline issues, effect on child's behaviour.

Do you feel that having a child at the school effects your role in any way?

#### ❖ **Policy and Changes:**

What you think about the government's proposal to increase the role and responsibilities of TAs?

How has the remodelling policy affected you personally?

Probe: more non-contact time

How would you feel about the TAs in this school taking whole classes?

In what ways can the career paths of TAs be improved?

In what ways can your school better deploy TAs?

How do you see the role of TAs changing in the future?

Is there anything else that you feel that has not been mentioned?

#### ❖ **Extra questions**

#### **Thanks/Debrief**

Are there any questions you would like to ask me about the research and/or the interview?

The data may be transcribed but all efforts will be made to anonymise your details, so that you are not identifiable in any written report/thesis. Everything we have discussed is of course confidential.

Thank you again for your time and participation.

## **Parent Interview Schedule**

*Interview aims: to ascertain parents' perspectives on TA's roles, the felt impact, if any, on their children's education, to gauge the level of parental involvement at home and school and investigate the factors shaping school choice. Also explore their understandings of what sort of neighbourhood the school is located in.*

Introduction: information about research, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and Anonymity.

### **❖ Relationship with school & staff**

How would you describe your relationship with the school?

Probe: support staff, teachers, and senior management.

Who do you have most contact with?

Probe: support staff, teachers, and senior management.

How do you communicate with the school?

Probe: face to face, letters, telephone calls.

In what ways do you get involved in school life?

Probe: concerts, governors, etc.

In what ways do you feel that the school makes your child included in the school community?

Probe: sensitivity to child's needs.

Do you feel that there is a sense of leadership in the school?

Probe: from whom, in what ways.

How could home-school relationships be improved in your opinion?

Do you feel that there is a sense of community at the school?

### **❖ Support Staff**

What do you think is the role that support staff have within the school?

Probe: knowledge of differences in the role, significance of the role, after school club etc.

Are you aware of the government's policy, which is to enable teaching assistants to take whole classes, how do you feel about that?

Probe: assumption of competence, why

Quite a lot of TAs are parents as well, what do you feel is the appeal of being a TA for parent?

Probe: is it something the parent has considered?

Do you see any of the staff outside the school?

Probe: who, and what contexts, socialise.

### **❖ Parental involvement at home & SATs**

In what ways do you make sure your child is prepared for school?

Do you monitor your child/ren's homework and school work?

The SATs are coming up, how are you preparing your child for the exams?

Probe: extra tuition, books, setting own targets, extra school clubs, Saturday school.

### ❖ **School Choice**

What made you choose this school for your child/ren ?

Probe: siblings, local area, reputation, contacts.

What were your experiences of school like?

Probe: discipline/fun/history as habitus?

What are you looking for in a secondary school for your child?

Probe: right mix, distance, locality, friendship groups.

Would you like your child to attend a local secondary school?

Probe: the 'viable' options, criteria.

How is the school helping you secure a secondary place for your child?

Probe: open days, information, no help.

Do you feel that the school is preparing your child for secondary school life?

Probe: teaching style, diversity of curriculum etc.

In what ways do you think your child's experience at school can be improved?

### ❖ **Aspirations**

What are your aspirations and dreams for your child/ren as they grow up?

How do you think that their time at the school has prepared them for the 'wider world'?

Is there anything else that you feel that has not been mentioned?

### ❖ **For governors/PTA members**

Do you feel that the PTA represents your views as a parent?

What does being a parent governor mean to you?

Probe: influence, insider knowledge.

What encouraged you to be a parent governor?

Probe: time, child, influence.

How would you describe the relationship between the governors and the staff? Probe: support staff, head, and teachers.

❖ **Extra questions**

**Thanks/Debrief**

Are there any questions you would like to ask me about the research and/or the interview?

The data may be transcribed but all efforts will be made to anonymise your details, so that you are not identifiable in any written report/thesis. Everything we have discussed is of course confidential.

Thank you again for your time and participation.

## **Pupil Interview Schedule**

*Interview aims: to ascertain the perspectives of pupils regarding the support they/others in their class receive and their perspective on school life.*

Introduction: information about research, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

### **❖ General Questions**

What are the most fun bits of school?

Probe: why, kind activities, times

Thinking of your favourite teachers, and don't tell me, what is it that you like about them?

Probe: why

What are your favourite lessons/subjects?

Probe: why

How would you make the school better?

### **❖ Roles in the classroom**

Who helps you to learn at school?

Probe: teacher/SS.

Who do the SS help in your class?

Probe: children, teacher, why

What do you think is the difference between what the teacher does and what the LSA does in your class?

\*What is the best thing about having [name of relevant SS] help you?

\*When do you most need help?

If/when would you go to SS if there was a problem [bullying, fighting, upset etc].

Probe: SS, teachers, others.

Who do you think is stricter, the teacher or the TA/LSA?

Probe: why.

### **❖ Friendships and social relations**

Who are your friends at school?

Probe: criteria (cool, sporty, etc)

Do you play with any of your school friends outside school?

Probe: criteria, why

What do you like doing in your spare time?

Probe: kinds of activities, favourite pop stars/singers etc.

## **Senior management/headteachers' interview schedule**

*Interview aims: to ascertain the perspectives of senior management staff (heads/deputies and non-teaching staff) on the deployment and management of support staff, leadership, home-school relationships and school ethos.*

Introduction: information about research, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

### **❖ TA deployment:**

How has your day been?

What is the TA/LSA role in this school?

How has the role of TA changed since you have been teaching?

Probe: national curriculum, SEN.

How do you feel that TAs contribute to the education of the children?

Probe: examples.

How do you as senior management support TAs?

How would you describe the relationship between senior management and support staff?

Probe: communication, trust,

How does the school support TAs?

Probe: staff meetings, newsletter, pigeon holes, training, monitoring, qualifications, meetings, policies

In what ways can the school better deploy TAs?

### **❖ Recruitment & Retention**

What does the school do to recruit TAs?

Probe: volunteer parents, any policies.

What are the qualities you look for in potential TAs?

Probe: parents, qualifications, local residents,

What does the school do to retain support staff?

Probe: pay, career development.

### **❖ Vision and leadership & Professionalism**

How do you as part of senior management provide leadership to your colleagues?

Probe: policies, actions,

What brings this school together?



What does leadership mean to you?

What does professionalism mean to you as a teacher/head?  
Probe: commitment, colleagues, understanding the children,

What are the challenges facing teachers today?

What do you think are the pressures on teachers' time?

#### ❖ **Home –school relationships**

How would you describe the home-school relationships in this school?  
Probe: account of the involvement of parents, parental voice

How do you foster such relationships?  
Probe: reports, open days, chats, how can they be improved.

What do you see as the role of the parent governors?  
Probe: scrutiny, representation, fundraising, passive, active.

#### ❖ **Changes and the future:**

Why do you think that schools have an increased need for TAs?

What you think about the government's proposal to increase the role and responsibilities of TAs?

How would you feel about TAs in this school taking whole classes?  
Probe: support, training.

In what ways can the career paths of TAs be improved?

How do you see the role of the TAs changing in the future?

Is there anything that we have not covered that you would like to mention?

#### ❖ **SENCO/EMAS**

What is the role of the SENCO in this school?

How would you describe the relationship between yourself and teachers/TAs?  
Probe: communication, authority.

What do you feel is the role of TAs in SEN/EMAS provision?

How do you support TAs in their role?  
Probe: meetings, training.

**\*Parent Teachers**

What do you feel are the advantages in working in the same school as your child?

Probe: timetable, flexibility, picking up bullying etc, more information on their development, control.

What do you feel are the disadvantages?

Probe: discipline issues, affect on child's behaviour.

Do you feel that having a child at the school affects your role in any way?

**❖ Extra Questions:**

**Thanks/Debrief**

Are there any questions you would like to ask me about the research and/or the interview?

The data may be transcribed but all efforts will be made to anonymise your details, so that you are not identifiable in any written report/thesis. Everything we have discussed is of course confidential.

Thank you again for your time and participation.

## **Turkish parents' interview Schedule (interpreted into Turkish by interviewer)**

*Focus Group Interview aims: to ascertain Turkish speaking parents' perspectives and experiences of the educational system and issues surrounding home-school relations and parental involvement.*

Introduction: information about research, permission to record, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality and Anonymity.

### **❖ Communicating with the school**

If you have a problem or issue regarding your child/ any aspect of school, who would you speak to about it?

Probe: support staff, bilingual assistant, senior management and why.

How do you communicate with the school?

Probe: preferred methods of contact; face to face, letters, telephone calls, speak to the teacher, and why.

How do you think communication between the school and Turkish speaking parents could be improved?

Probe: translated newsletters, forums, use of the bilingual assistant, open evenings.

### **❖ Negotiating the English school system**

In your house, whose responsibility is it to deal with school matters?

Probe: gender, domestic and work commitments.

In what ways does the English education system differ from the one you experienced yourself?

Probe: level of parental involvement, what the children learn, kinds of educational staff, how they are taught.

What do you think is expected from you as a parent?

Probe: uncertainty, how are expectations conveyed if at all.

How do you support your child at home?

Probe: language issues, parents' prior educational attainment, confidence with the curriculum, responsibility for domestic tasks, support from partner,

In what way does your partner support the children's education?

Probe: working hours, gender roles, money.

Do you socialise with other Turkish parents?

Probe: venues/ spaces of interaction, gender issues. Contact with English speakers.

### **❖ Parental involvement**

How do you think you could be helped to support your child with their education?

Probe: language classes, more information etc.

In what ways do you/would you like to get involved in school life?

Probe: are they aware of governing body and what it does, e.g. concerts, cake sales etc.  
Barriers such as language, confidence, domestic responsibilities.

How would you describe your relationship with the school?

Probe: teachers, senior management, support staff.

How do you think the relationship between the school and Turkish speaking parents could be improved?

Do you feel that you know enough about what happens in the school?

Probe: curriculum issues, trips, social events, does it matter.

Are you aware that there are other members of staff, like X, called Teaching Assistants, and what they do?

Probe: distinctions between teacher's role and the assistant role, terminology. Are they aware of any relevant policy initiatives.

Have you considered working or volunteering in a primary school?

Probe: what are the barriers; domestic and caring responsibilities.

#### ❖ Experiences of family learning courses

Thinking about this course, how has it benefited you?

Probe: language skills, socialise with other parents, better understanding of how the school works, getting to know some of the staff.

What do you think schools in general could do to help Turkish speaking children succeed in their education?

Thank you for your time.

#### Thanks/Debrief

Are there any questions you would like to ask me about the research and/or the interview?

The data may be transcribed but all efforts will be made to anonymise your details, so that you are not identifiable in any written report/thesis. Everything we have discussed is of course confidential.

Thank you again for your time and participation.

## Appendix F: Fieldwork Questionnaires

This section documents the questionnaires used to gather basic socio-demographic information from informants.

### Teaching Assistant Questionnaire

This is a quick questionnaire about you, to help gather statistical information. It is completely confidential and all the data will be anonymised.

What is your job title?

- 1.) I am currently a: Classroom Assistant ☐ Learning Support Assistant ☐  
Teaching Assistant ☐ Learning mentor ☐  
Other ☐ (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

- 2.) Do you have extra responsibilities? Yes ☐ No ☐  
If yes, what are they? Breakfast Club ☐ After school club ☐  
Other ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

- 3.) How old are you?  
18-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐  
46-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61+ ☐

- 4.) Sex: male ☐ female ☐

- 5.) How long have you been in your job?  
Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

- 6.) What was your previous job/occupation **if** different from current one?  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 7.) Do you work?  
Full time ☐ Part time ☐

- 8.) Which below best describes your household income?  
<10K ☐ 11K-20K ☐ 21K-30K ☐ 31K-40K ☐ 41K-50K ☐ 51-60K ☐  
61-70K ☐ 71-80K ☐ 81-90K ☐ 91-100K ☐ 101K+ ☐

- 9.) What is your **highest** achieved qualification?  
GCSEs/O-levels ☐ A levels/or equivalent ☐ NVQs ☐ BTEC ☐  
Diploma ☐ Degree ☐  
Other ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

- 10.) Do you have any Children? Yes ☐ No ☐  
If yes, did/do any of your child/ren attend this school? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 11.) Are you: married/living with partner ☐ Single parent ☐ Single ☐  
Divorced ☐ Other ☐ (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

If applicable, what is your partner/spouse's occupation

\_\_\_\_\_

- 12.) What kind of accommodation do you live in?  
Owner Occupied ☐ Rented (council) ☐ Rented (private) ☐ Other ☐  
(Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- 13.) Do you live in a?  
Flat ☐ Maisonette ☐ Terraced house ☐ Semi/Detached house ☐ Other ☐  
(Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- 14.) Do you live in the local area? Yes ☐ No ☐
- 15.) What is your ethnic background?  
Please describe \_\_\_\_\_
- 16.) Which year group/s do you currently work in?  
Reception ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐

I give my consent for the interview to be recorded and I recognise that I can withdraw this consent at any time. ☐

Thank you for your time and participation.

## Teacher questionnaire

This is a quick questionnaire about you, to help gather statistical information. It is completely confidential and all the data will be anonymised.

- 1.) I am currently a:      Class Teacher ☐      Support Teacher ☐  
Special Needs Teacher ☐      other ☐ (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2) I have added curricula management responsibilities for: ICT ☐      PSHE ☐ Literacy ☐  
Numeracy ☐ Science ☐ PE ☐ Art ☐ DT ☐ Music ☐ R.E ☐ Geography ☐  
History ☐ Teacher Governor ☐ Senior Teacher ☐ G&T ☐ EMAS ☐
  
- 3.) How old are you?  
18-20 ☐      21-25 ☐      26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐  
46-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐      61+ ☐
  
- 4.) Sex: male ☐      female ☐
  
- 5.) How long have you been teaching at this school?  
Years \_\_ Months \_\_
  
- 6.) Do you work?  
Full time ☐      Part time ☐
  
- 7.) What is your highest achieved qualification?  
GCSEs/O-levels ☐      A levels/or equivalent ☐      NVQs ☐      BTEC ☐  
Diploma ☐      Degree ☐  
Other ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 8.) Do you have QTS status? Yes ☐ No ☐
  
- 9.) Which below best describes your household income?  
<20K ☐      21-30K ☐      31K-40K ☐ 41K-50K ☐      51-60K ☐      61-70K ☐  
71-80K+ ☐      81-90K ☐      91-100K ☐      101K+ ☐
  
- 10.) How many support staff are in your class usually? \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 11.) How long have you been teaching altogether?  
Years \_\_ Months \_\_
  
- 12.) What was your previous job/occupation if different from current one?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 13.) Do you have any children?      Yes ☐      No ☐  
If yes, did/do any of your child/ren attend this school?      Yes ☐      No ☐
  
- 14.) Are you:      married/living with partner ☐      Single parent ☐      Single ☐  
Divorced ☐      other ☐ (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_  
If applicable, what is your partner/spouse's occupation \_\_\_\_\_

- 15.) What kind of accommodation do you live in?  
Owner Occupied ☐ Rented (Council) ☐ Rented (private) ☐ Other ☐  
(Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- 16.) Do you live in a?  
Flat ☐ Maisonette ☐ Terraced house ☐ Semi/Detached house ☐ Other ☐  
(Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- 17.) Do you live in the local area? Yes ☐ No ☐
- 18.) What is your ethnic background?  
Please describe \_\_\_\_\_
- 19.) Which year group/s do you teach?  
Reception ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐

I give my consent for the interview to be recorded and I recognise that I can withdraw this consent at any time. ☐

Thank you for your time and participation.



## Parent questionnaire

This is a quick questionnaire about you, to help gather statistical information. It is completely confidential and all the data will be anonymised.

1.) How old are you?  
18-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61+ ☐

2.) Sex: male ☐ female ☐

3.) Are you? Married/Living with Partner ☐ Single Parent ☐ Divorced ☐  
Other ☐ (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

4.) Are you? Employed **FT** ☐ or **PT** ☐  
(please describe occupation) \_\_\_\_\_  
Main carer ☐ Unemployed ☐

If applicable, what is your partner/spouse's occupation \_\_\_\_\_

5.) How would you describe your English language skills?  
Excellent (fluent) ☐ Very Good ☐ Fine ☐ Not So Good ☐ Extremely Poor ☐

6.) What kind of accommodation do you live in?  
Owner Occupied ☐ Rented (council) ☐ Rented (private) ☐ Other ☐  
(Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

7.) Do you live in a?  
Flat ☐ Maisonette ☐ Terraced house ☐ Semi/Detached house ☐  
Other ☐ (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

8.) How long have you lived in your current accommodation?  
Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

9.) How many child/ren do you have at the school? \_\_\_\_\_  
Nursery ☐ Reception ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐

10.) Do your child/ren have any special educational needs?

Yes (statemented) ☐ Yes (SEN register) ☐ No ☐

If yes, do any of them receive additional support for their special educational needs?  
Yes ☐ No ☐

Who is the additional support provided by?  
Class Teacher ☐ Support Staff ☐ S.E.N. teacher ☐

How would you rate the quality of the additional support provided?  
Poor ☐ Adequate ☐ Good ☐

11.) Do your child/ren attend: Breakfast club ☐ After school club ☐ Neither ☐

- 12.) Which below best describes your household income?  
<10K ☐ 11K-20K ☐ 21K-30K ☐ 31K-40K ☐ 41K-50K ☐ 51-60K ☐  
61-70K ☐ 71-80K ☐ 81-90K ☐ 91-100K ☐ 101K+ ☐
- 13.) What is your **highest** achieved qualification?  
GCSEs/O-levels ☐ A levels or equivalent ☐ NVQs ☐ BTEC ☐  
Diploma ☐ Degree ☐  
Other ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- 14.) What is your ethnic background?  
Please describe \_\_\_\_\_

I give my consent for the interview to be recorded and I recognise that I can withdraw this consent at any time. ☐

Thank you for your time and participation.

## Senior management questionnaire

This is a quick questionnaire about you, to help gather statistical information. It is completely confidential.

- 1.) I am currently: Headteacher ☐ Deputy ☐ Other ☐  
(please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2) I have added curricula/management responsibilities for:  
 ICT ☐ PSHE ☐ Literacy ☐ Numeracy ☐ Science ☐ PE ☐ Art ☐ DT ☐  
 Music ☐ R.E ☐ Geography ☐ History ☐ Teacher Governor ☐ Senior  
 Teacher ☐ G&T ☐ EMAS ☐ Finance ☐ SENCO ☐
  
- 3.) How old are you?  
 18-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐  
 46-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61+ ☐
  
- 4.) Sex: male ☐ female ☐
  
- 5.) How long have you been working at this school?  
 Years\_\_ Months\_\_
  
- 6.) Do you work?  
 Full time ☐ Part time ☐
  
- 7.) What is your highest achieved qualification?  
 GCSEs/O-levels ☐ A levels/or equivalent ☐ NVQs ☐ BTEC ☐  
 Diploma ☐ Degree ☐ Other (e.g. MBA/MA) ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 8.) Do you have QTS status? Yes ☐ No ☐
  
- 9.) Which below best describes your household income?  
 <20K ☐ 21-30K ☐ 31K-40K ☐ 41K-50K ☐ 51-60K ☐ 61-70K+ ☐ 71-  
 80K ☐ 81-90K ☐ 91-100K ☐ 101K+ ☐
  
- 10.) How long have you been in teaching altogether?  
 Years\_\_ Months\_\_
  
- 11.) What was your previous job/occupation if different from current one?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 12.) Do you have any children? Yes ☐ No ☐  
 If yes, did/do any of your child/ren attend this school? Yes ☐ No ☐
  
- 13.) Are you: married/living with partner ☐ Single parent ☐ Single ☐  
 Divorced ☐ other ☐ (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
  
- If applicable, what is your partner/spouse's occupation \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 14.) Do you live in the local area? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 15.) What kind of accommodation do you live in?  
Owner Occupied ☐ Rented (Council) ☐ Rented (private) ☐  
Other ☐ (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- 16.) Do you live in a?  
Flat ☐ Maisonette ☐ Terraced house ☐ Semi/Detached house ☐ Other ☐  
(Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- 17.) What is your ethnic background?  
Please describe \_\_\_\_\_
- 18.) Which year group do you teach **if any**?  
None ☐ Reception ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐

I give my consent for the interview to be recorded and I recognise that I can withdraw this consent at any time. ☐

Thank you for your time and participation.

## **Appendix G: Recruitment Letters**

This section provides the letters used in facilitating access to schools and invitation to participate in the research.

### **Specific letter to Head**

Ayo Mansaray, (BA, MA, MSc) PhD Student  
**Supervisor:** Anthony Green \*\*\*\*\*@ioe.ac.uk  
School of Foundational Education Policy Studies  
Institute of Education, University of London  
20 Bedford Way,  
WC1H 0AL

Dear Xxxx,

I recently conducted a group interview that included a few of your Teaching assistants (\*\*\*\*\*/\*\*\*\*\*) who were on a course at the Xxxxx. I am a researcher conducting my PhD on *Education policy, Teaching assistants and Teachers' Working Lives & Roles*. As you aware, with the advent of the Working Time Agreement, deployment of support staff is an important issue for schools on which there is little research or guidance. This is an opportunity to take part in an important study which looks at actual school practices. It is an independent piece of research that is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (**ESRC**). As part of this project, I would like to undertake fieldwork in primary schools. This will involve interviewing teachers, teaching assistants and other staff about their work coupled with observations of lessons and the collection of school documents/policies. The interviews would between 45-60mins.

I realise that schools are extremely busy places and the observation of lessons might be a sensitive issue. I have a current CRB, and I worked as primary school teacher for just under two years.

If your school is interested in taking part and/or you require further information about the project please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Ayo Mansaray

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Tel: 0208 \*\*\* \*\*

\*\*\*\*\*@ntlworld.com

**Generic letter to heads**

Ayo Mansaray, (BA, MA, MSc) PhD Student  
**Supervisor:** Anthony Green \*\*\*\*\*@ioe.ac.uk  
School of Foundational Education Policy Studies  
Institute of Education, University of London  
20 Bedford Way,  
WC1H 0AL

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a researcher conducting my PhD on *Education policy, Teaching assistants and Teachers' Working Lives & Roles*. As you are aware, with the advent of the Working Time Agreement, deployment of support staff is a significant issue for schools. This is an opportunity to take part in an important study which looks at actual school practices. It is an independent piece of research that is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (**ESRC**).

As part of this project, I have to undertake fieldwork in primary schools. This will involve collecting documents and school policies, and conducting interviews (of 40-60mins) with relevant members of staff at a mutually convenient time. Since the aim of the project is partly to see what effect **Remodelling** is having on TA/teacher relationships, pedagogy and roles, I mostly want to **observe**. I may also record lessons with permission. The benefit for the school is that they get the opportunity to have 'reflexive' knowledge of their own working practices should they wish. The research will not encroach on valuable teacher time.

I realise that schools are extremely busy places and the observation of lessons might be a sensitive issue. I have a current **CRB**.

If your school is interested in taking part and/or you require further information about the project please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Ayo Mansaray

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Tel: 0208 \*\*\* \*\*

\*\*\*\*\*@ntlworld.com

**Generic letter to TAs**

Ayo Mansaray, PhD Student  
School of Foundational Education Policy Studies  
Institute of Education, University of London  
20 Bedford Way,  
WC1H 0AL

Dear Classroom Assistant/LSA/Teaching Assistant

You have been asked to take part in an **independent** research projected about classroom assistants' and teachers' work conducted by me, Ayo Mansaray, a research student at the University of London.

The aim is to find out what you as a classroom assistant/LSA/Teaching Assistant **think** about **your role and responsibilities** within the school and **other aspects** of your working life. To help do this, with your permission, I would like to interview you, as well possibly observing some lessons. The interview will last roughly 50mins to an hour and will be recorded and transcribed. You can withdraw from the project at any time and you do not have to take part.

This is not an evaluation of any kind, and is completely **independent** of the school. It is about your concerns and views regarding your job. I thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you require further information about the project please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Ayo Mansaray

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Tel: 0208 \*\*\* \*\*

\*\*\*\*\*@ntlworld.com

### Generic letter to teachers

Ayo Mansaray, (BA, MA, MSc) PhD Student  
**Supervisor:** Anthony Green \*\*\*\*\*@ioe.ac.uk  
School of Foundational Education Policy Studies  
Institute of Education, University of London  
20 Bedford Way,  
WC1H 0AL

Dear Teacher

You have been asked to take part in an **independent** project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), about teachers working lives and the work of teaching assistants. I am a PhD student at the University of London.

The aim is to find out what you as a teacher **think** about **your role and responsibilities** within the school and **other aspects** of your working life **and** the role of the TA. To help do this, with your permission, I would like to interview you, as well possibly observing some lessons. The interview will last roughly 50mins to an hour and will be recorded and transcribed. You can withdraw from the project at any time and you do not have to take part.

This is not an evaluation of any kind, and is completely **independent** of the school. It is about your concerns and views regarding your job. I thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you require further information about the project please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Ayo Mansaray

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Tel: 0208 \*\*\* \*\*

\*\*\*\*\*@ntlworld.com